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The Life Worth While

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The Life Worth While

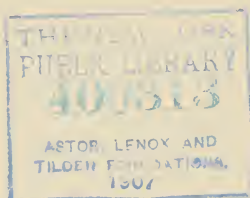
By
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Contents

	PAGE
I—The Satisfied Soul - - -	9
II—The Blessed Life - - -	15
III—Not By Bread Alone - -	20
IV—The Most Necessary Thing	26
V—Love the Law of Life - -	33
VI—A Heart at Rest - - - -	42
VII—The Way of Life - - -	47
VIII—The Condition of Service -	53
IX—The Secret of a Fruitful Life - - - - -	57
X—The Thing That Counts With God - - - - -	61
XI—When a Man is Free - -	65
XII—The Worship of Success -	70
XIII—Making a Choice - - -	74
XIV—My Two Natures - - -	79
XV—The Victorious Life - -	83

Contents—Continued

XVI—A Well Armed Man - - -	88
XVII—Consecration vs. Annihila- tion - - - - -	93
XVIII—The Source of Power - -	96
XIX—The Lowly in Heart - - -	101
XX—Heart Questions A b o u t Prayer - - - - -	107
XXI—Judging Others - - - -	114
XXII—How Often Shall I For- give? - - - - -	117
XXIII—The Unruly Member - -	121
XXIV—The Hour of Temptation -	128
XXV—Sweetening Our Pleasures -	133
XXVI—The Grace of Thankful- ness - - - - -	136
XXVII—When the Heart Aches - -	144
XXVIII—In the Day of Doubt - -	148
XXIX—Doubt's Surest Remedy -	161
XXX—In the Hour of Peril - -	165
XXXI—The Limit of H u m a n Power - - - - -	169
XXXII—In the Valley of the Shadow	173
XXXIII—Comfort in Bereavement -	183

To know Him though we cannot understand Him, even as our children know us but do not understand our ways; to be always conscious that He is, that He is actually with us, that His eyes melt with tenderness whenever He looks upon us; to recognize Him as our Lord whom we have enthroned in our hearts forever; to serve Him and our fellowmen blithely and with a gentle hand; to keep the current of our lives in the channel of His truth; and to watch daily for the footprints of Him who has gone before to prepare a place for us—these are aims that are worthy of all that is loftiest and best in man.

For it is in the fulfilment of these aims that we shall find life—life eternal; the only satisfying life; the only life worth while.

I

The Satisfied Soul

Man may be defined as the animal that is hardest to satisfy. The poor woman at Jacob's well is a fitting type of a world that drinks its wells dry and never ceases its thirsty cry. We are all desire. Our flesh desires much; our minds yearn for more; our souls—who can fathom the desires of a man's soul? We yearn, and yearn, and yearn. We go in quest of pleasure and come back tired, but never satisfied. We chase a pleasure as a child chases a butterfly, and when we find it we straightway look for another. And we live in a world

that is provokingly unsatisfying. It is always offering to quench our thirst and always putting to our lips the cup that inflames thirst. When the world does its best it satisfies us but for a moment, and as a rule, when we say that we are satisfied we are only surfeited, as when a child eats a pound of candy and will have no more. As for the mind, every truth-seeker knows that there is no way to quench the thirst for knowledge except by starvation. The more we know the more we want to know, and our craving never ceases until we cease to know anything. As for the soul, the world does not seriously attempt to satisfy it. It has nothing to quench the thirst of our immortal part, and it can only suggest something to keep our souls wrapped in slumber that they may not be conscious of hunger, as a helpless mother without food for her hungry children tries to get them off to sleep that they may

cease to cry. "Whosoever drinketh of this water," says Jesus—whosoever seeks to satisfy his thirst at any of the wells that the world has provided for men—"shall thirst again." A man may go round the world and drink deep at every fountain of pleasure that the world owns, and he may come home surfeited, but he will not be satisfied. The world has no drink to satisfy the thirst of the soul.

And yet the famished multitude is still spending its money for that which is not bread, and its labor for that which satisfieth not. This world is a great fair—a vanity fair—in which men and women and children jostle one another in their mad rush to the booths where fakirs sell toy balloons, and popguns, and firecrackers, and cheap jewelry, and mysterious prize-boxes—all warranted to satisfy every craving of the human heart. How very absurd! Yet, many of us who think ourselves wiser than

the crowd are sometimes caught up in the mad rush, and before we know what we are doing we too are spending our money for that which is not bread. My neighbor on my right was sure that the only thing in the world he needed to make him perfectly happy was a home of his own. But the home multiplied his wants a hundred-fold and brought more unrest. My neighbor on my left thought that all he needed was another ten thousand. But the ten thousand brought more unrest. My little girl was confident that the secret of human happiness was all wrapped up in a "perfect love" of a new spring hat. But the new hat brought a craving for another new dress.

Is it possible to satisfy the human soul? I know some souls that have surely learned the secret, for they are no longer feverish or restless, and whatever befalls them they are always able to eat their meat with glad-

ness and singleness of heart. They have not found wealth, or honor, or social position, but they have found that which has satisfied them. They have learned that it is not what a man gathers from without but what is developed within that determines his wellbeing. They have learned that the thirst which men are trying to quench is not physical or mental, but spiritual, and they have discovered for themselves that there is nothing which can satisfy the cravings of a man's spirit but the presence and friendship of the great Spirit.

And how did they discover the secret? By listening to the voice of Him who stands in the temple crying, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." That is all. There is nothing that can satisfy spirit but spirit. It is the testimony of all men who have come to Christ that "he satisfieth the longing soul." No man has ever been disappointed in him. No man who has opened

his heart to him has complained that there was still an aching void. He meets our case. He is our sufficiency. He is our satisfier.

II

The Blessed Life

I have just said that it is not what a man gathers from without but what he develops within that determines his well being. Real blessedness is no more dependent upon one's outward circumstances than essential manhood is dependent upon the clothes one wears. This truth has been verified by the experience of men from the beginning of time, yet it comes to many a man to-day as a genuine sensation. We say, Blessed is the man who is satisfied with himself. We envy these men who look so comfortable, and who pat themselves with the comfor-

table air of one saying to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." There are times when we can grasp our Lord's view of this sort of thing—in bereavement, for instance, or when sitting alone with one's conscience, or under a melting sermon—but how hard it is to realize the blessedness of the poor in spirit when dining with a company of men of the world who have achieved wealth or fame? Yet, at a single turn of the wheel of fortune we may come again to understand how utterly hollow is the happiness that rests upon the things one gathers about him.

Blessed is the man that laughs, say we. Yet who does not know that it is the tearless life that is rich in misery? As for the meek we contend that they will be driven off the face of the earth. Yet as we grow older we learn little by little that it is not the man who elbows his way with much

noise and perspiration that makes his way in the world, but rather it is the man who quietly bides his time, and often with a smile gives way to the blustering fellow who is trying to run over him. If we have not yet learned that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are blessed, we have surely learned by this time that the man who never hungers and thirsts after righteousness remains as empty and dry in his spirit as a last year's gourd. It is not the man who is always looking for somebody to show him mercy but the man who shows mercy that is blessed. It is not the man who is peculiarly favored in his surroundings that will see God but the man with a pure heart. It is not the man who is descended from Abraham, but the man who promotes peace that is recognized as a child of God. And what is all this but simply another way of saying that it is not what comes to a man from without but

what he carries with him in his heart that makes him truly blessed?

Now the question comes home to us: If true blessedness is not a matter of outward circumstances—if it is not a matter of better food, better clothes, better social position and all that—should we who desire real happiness give our whole thought and strength and time to this one thing of trying to improve our material surroundings? Should we mourn over our material poverty always and over our spiritual poverty never? Should we be always craving worldly pleasures and never yearn for any real spiritual good? Should we spend our whole time drawing water from a well that never satisfies, and give no thought to the ever-springing fountain which Christ is ready to open up in our hearts? Should we be always looking for favors rather than seeking to show mercy? Should we wear our fingers to the bone trying to keep our

surroundings clean and never give a thought to the cleansing of our hearts? If the rule of Christ in our heart is the only source of blessedness should we not seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Should we not put the kingdom foremost in all things?

III

Not By Bread Alone

If outward circumstances have nothing to do with real happiness what part should a Christian have in the world's struggle for what we are accustomed to call the good things of this life?

I recall that when Jesus spoke of the evil of consuming one's life in the accumulation of wealth for its own sake he was not addressing an audience of millionaires. He was speaking to poor people who had always been poor, and who were now by reason of a long prevailing financial depression less likely to become rich men than ever. They had reached that point in the struggle for bread where one is liable to

forget that man must not live by bread alone, and where one is apt to form the most extravagant notions of wealth. In other words, they were at the point where many a man of to-day ordinarily finds himself six days in the week. They knew how hard poverty was, and they reasoned that wealth must be a soft bed to lie on. "If a man has money," they must have said, just as we are saying to-day, "he can do anything; without money he is a whipped dog."

And so it was to you and me and the rest of the world's great army of fevered toilers that Jesus spoke when he said: "The question of life does not depend upon the abundance of things which one may possess. Men have lived nobly and successfully without possessions, and men have added great wealth to their names without adding either length or breadth to their lives thereby. Life is more than making a living, and a man should not wear his

life away with anxiety over that which is least, as if one could live by bread alone, or as if God, who is interested in the life, could not be trusted to exercise a providential care over it. Even nature rebukes your anxiety and points to his loving care. The ravens which are not able, as you are, to sow and reap, and which have neither storehouse nor barn, go about their simple task of looking for their food, and God feeds them. How much more are ye better than the birds? And the lilies—study them intently and take the lesson to heart: see how they grow; they do not toil nor spin that they may clothe themselves with beautiful garments, and yet I say unto you that even Solomon, the highest type of magnificence, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. If God clothes the lilies how much more will he clothe you.”

One cannot help noticing that the opinion of Solomon’s magnificence thus inci-

mentally expressed is as far from asceticism on the one hand as it is from worldliness on the other. It is not an expression of contempt. Jesus did not in one breath urge men to work and in the next belittle their workmanship. He was not one of those who exalt labor and abuse its fruits. He did not teach that it was a virtue to sow but a sin to reap. He removed the fruit of Solomon's labors from the mountain top where the glamoured world had put it, but he did not trample it in the dust, nor put it among thorns or noxious weeds; he placed it beneath the shadow of one of God's lilies. No one who has considered a lily can call that contemptuous treatment.

Holy men of old had compared man to a flower. "As a flower of the field so he flourisheth." Jesus took up the familiar figure and declared that, in the matter of distinguishing ornament, man is inferior to a

flower. No man has ever been able to array himself as gloriously as God arrays a lily. All these things which we strive and groan and agonize after, which cost us sleepless nights and almost bloody sweat, are not, when we have gotten them, equal to the robes which are provided for the helpless lily that does not know how to strive nor cry. Solomon scoured the earth to surround himself with magnificence like an aureola, and when he had spent himself in the task the result did not equal the glory with which God, in the meantime, had arrayed the humble lilies which, tied down to their narrow homes, could only keep their hearts wide open to receive what heaven's thoughtful love might send. Not that the glory of Solomon was so small, but that what God does for the humblest of his creatures is so great. Not that the workmanship of our hands is despised in his sight, but that, as compared with what

he does for his helpless ones, it is as an artificial flower to a real one, a painting to a sunset. We are not taught to despise the things which Solomon possessed, but we are warned that we make a terrible mistake when we place such an extravagant estimate upon worldly glory that we are willing to neglect our souls and wear ourselves out in the struggle for it. Better would it be to leave all the treasures of earth to moth and rust and thieves than that the soul should be corroded with care. Better would it be to starve the body than starve the soul.

But the man who comes to this point need not look for starvation. For while man is like a flower in his career, and inferior to a flower in adornment, he is infinitely higher and better than a flower in the thought of God. If the providence of God stoops low enough to care for a lily, can it, in stooping miss the humblest of his children?

IV

The Most Necessary Thing

Let us now think of little while, in this chapter and in those which follow, about some of the things which have to do with our well being. First we will think of faith. We place faith foremost not because it is the greatest thing in the world, for it is not, but because it is the fundamental thing—the most necessary thing. The wonderful achievements of faith and the high estimate which our Lord placed upon it have given it an air of mystery, and it is not an uncommon notion that there is something magical about it. Yet one has

only to put himself for a moment in the place which Jesus occupies in the presence of one who has appealed to him for help—as, for example, the leper, or the centurion—to see that it is not mysterious at all, and that its apparently magical power is the most natural power in the world.

For faith is the point at which weakness takes hold of strength. A little child stands before me. She is very beautiful; she is winsome; she is good; she has many charming traits. But the little thing is in distress and she has come to me for help. And she appeals to me in a way that shows that she has the utmost confidence not only in my power to help her, but in my willingness to help her. She has come trusting me implicitly. Now, what do I see in this child? What is the thing that gets hold of my heart and draws me to her? Is it her beauty? her winsome ways? her goodness? Is it not the fact that she is

trusting me? And it makes little difference what she asks—I will go through fire and flood rather than that she should trust me in vain.

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” Men talk of the unreasonableness of faith, but what is more reasonable than that God should be touched by the cry of those who trust in him? I do not say that this is all there is in faith, but this is enough to account for its drawing power. If you and I will answer the appeal of faith that comes to us from another man’s child, how much more will our Father in heaven answer the appeals of faith which his own children make to him!

I have said that faith is the most natural power in the world. And it is the most necessary power. It is the motive power that runs the world. Without faith the wheels of the world would stand still. We

never do anything without faith except in our insane moments when we are moved by sheer animal impulse. Take faith out of the world and there would be no life; there would be only stagnation, cold boilers, dead wires, death. Take faith out of business and there would be a world-panic as soon as the wires could carry the news. Take faith out of the home and you would have left—perdition. Take faith out of society and every man would snatch up his gun and take to the woods, each seeking some retreat in which he could barricade himself against the whole world. The thing that makes the world beautiful and happy is love. But the thing that makes the world endurable is faith. Faith is the most necessary thing in the world.

Perhaps there is no grander spectacle in all ancient history than that of Abram the Chaldean leaving home and friends, and at the command of heaven striking out across

the country for an unknown land with no assurance that he would ever have a home again—striking out through the dark “not knowing whither he went.” It is the grandeur of courage, we say sometimes; and again, the grandeur of implicit obedience. But no, it is the grandeur of faith; for it was his faith that gave him the courage and the will to obey.

That picture of the father of the faithful overwhelms us like a glimpse of a great mountain. We feel small. We feel so weak. There are two things we are always crying out for—courage to obey, and the will to obey. We see the right and we want to walk in it, but our worldly friends—what will they say? We see our duty and we want to perform it, and the spirit is willing but the flesh is so weak. When we look for courage our hands tremble and our hearts grow faint. I said we want to walk in the right way, and we want to do our

duty; perhaps I should have said we have a desire, though we have not the will. We lack the power to obey. And so we cry out for courage, and we cry out for the spirit of obedience; and we are still cowards, and still disobedient. What is the trouble? If Abram's faith had been small would he have had the courage to say to his friends that Heaven had commanded him to go to an unknown country? Could he have faced their ridicule? Could he have passed by in silence their suspicions of his sanity? Would he have had the courage to go at all? If his faith had been small would he have had the will to go? Would he have been strong to obey? Would he have cared whether he obey or not? But having faith he had both courage and the spirit of obedience; and he had all that he needed. Having faith he could obey, and in obeying he drew God to himself to be his protector, to stand by him, to favor those who fav-

ored him, to punish those who sought to hurt him. Having faith in God he became the friend of God.

And so this is my need—to have faith in God. How can I cultivate the little faith that I have? I notice that I have believed in him more since I have learned him better. If, then, I learn him better still—if I read more about him in his Word, if I commune with him oftener, if I listen more earnestly to his voice, if I follow more closely his will, if I get closer to his heart—will I not believe in him better still?

Love The Law of Life

I have said that faith is the motive power that runs the world. But it would not be worth while for the world to run at all if there were no love. For love is the thing that makes life worth living. It is the very essence of the real life—the life of the spirit. It is the spirit what the breath is to the body. There is no spiritual life without it. There is no good without it, for God is love; and a thing is good only as it approaches the likeness of God.

In his wonderful "charity" chapter Paul teaches us that whatever else we may have,

if our hearts are not saturated with love, we are nothing. Love is the fulfilling of the law—the law of God, the law of life, the law of all good. Love is the thing that secures for us all that is beautiful in life and preserves us from all that is ugly and that makes us wretched. For example, it is patient with the faults of others, and keeps us from the discomfort of worrying over other men's weaknesses. It never envies, and therefore keeps us from much unspeakable misery. It never thinks too much of self, is never puffed up, and therefore keeps us from all danger of being humiliated. It never behaves itself unseemly, and therefore saves us from the unhappy consequences of acting the fool. It is not always seeking its own and making us miserably selfish. It is not easily provoked, and therefore saves us from those outbreaks of temper that make so many of us unhappy. It does not suspect men, and

so saves us from losing faith in humanity. It never takes delight in iniquity—a sensation which a man never has without becoming more of a fiend than he was before. It finds joy in the progress of the truth. It bears and endures all things. It looks on the best side, and believes in the best that's in men. And it never ceases to hope.

Great is love, for great is God. How may we come into possession of this great gift? The answer is plain: By opening our hearts to God who is love. If we will lay ourselves entirely upon his altar, if we will receive him wholly into our hearts, he will come in and take possession of us. And when he is in possession, love will be in possession.

But love is not a wild flower that best thrives beyond the touch of human hands. It is rather a rose that grows on to perfection in proportion to the intelligent, sympathetic care that is bestowed upon it. If

love grows somebody must be the gardener. We must cultivate it. We must continue to cultivate it. There will never come a time when we can safely lay it by and leave it to care for itself.

What can I do to cultivate my love? Did you ever watch the development of love in the baby in your home? Your baby does not begin loving by loving everybody. He begins by loving his mother. And he begins loving his mother only after she has gently with her own hands, as it were, opened up his little heart to hers. Now watch love grow. When the mother is sure that her own image has found a place in the little heart she has opened, she brings before that open heart day by day father, sister, brother, until the little one begins to love father and sister and brother. Then she begins to tell him about God, and by and by there comes before his little heart some vision of God that makes him as real

as the face of his father, and he begins to love God. How does the baby learn to love mother, father, sister, brother, God? By learning them. By finding them out. By learning them better and better. It is a matter of association—association with mother, father, sister, brother; association with the thought of God which the mother keeps continually before him. Break up this association and the baby's love will grow cold. He may even cease in time to love his mother if she is taken out of his sight and her name is never uttered in his presence.

It is in association that love is formed, and by association that love grows.

So, if you and I want to love our fellow-men more we must associate with them more. We must learn them better. We must discover how lovable they are. We must learn how worthy they are of our confidence. And if we want to love God we must associate with him more. We must

learn him better. God has given us his Book in which to learn about him. He has given us this larger book—the book of nature—and on every leaf and every blade of grass he has written a chapter that tells of his love. What use do I make of my Bible? Do I read it to find out more about God?—to learn him better? Or do I read it only for conscience sake, or out of respect for the memory of my mother who taught me to read it? What use do I make of the place of secret prayer—my meeting place with God? Do I go to it to seek his presence that I may know him better, or do I go to it merely to “say” my prayers? Do I cultivate God as I cultivate those whom I want to know better and love better? Do I value his companionship? Shall I cultivate the neighbor whom I want to know better and stand afar off from God and expect him to perform some

strange miracle that will help me to love him more?

But is there nothing more that you and I can do to strengthen our love for God and for our fellowmen? Yes; we can give expression to the love we already have. And this, it seems to me, is what we need to do most of all just now. O friend, let love have its way in your life. What though that way may seem foolish and extravagant to loveless hearts! Loveless hearts are not our judges; God is our judge and God is love. Let love have its way. There is little enough of it in the world anyway, and if we repress the little we have there will soon be none at all. For love lives on loving deeds and loving words. Loving words, I mean, not merely sentimental words but words that are backed up by loving deeds.

Let love have its way in your heart. If it impels you to some great deed do it.

Don't sit down and count the cost. Love has little liking for arithmetic. It despises your bargain counters. It will do things with a grand sweep or not at all. It is the only impulse we can afford always to follow. Love, I mean; not mere gushing sentiment. This may impel you to foolish things, but love never does. Love, I mean, the kind of love that God has for you and me, and the kind that you and I have for him in our highest moments.

Let love have its way. Let the loving Marys pour out their hearts in precious gifts, and let no loveless Judases rebuke him. Never mind what the cold world says about it: if we repress our love out of respect for the cold world the cold world will freeze. We must warm the world back to life with our love. For this is what is the matter with the world to-day—there is so little love. And there is little love because we make so little use of the love we

have. Yonder is a man, who, a year ago took for granted that his wife ought to know his love for her without his telling her, and gradually left off expressing it either by words or deeds. To-day there is little love left in his heart to express. Over there is a boy, who, in the awkward, foolish years that must come to all boys, became ashamed to kiss his mother. He stopped, and to-day there is not enough love left to make him ever want to kiss her again. And yonder is a man who has smothered his impulse to show his love for God by some great sacrifice, some great deed of endurance, some hard, painful task; and now he is never moved to do anything for God. Oh, if we would only give expression to the love we have, how much more love we would have to express!

VI.

A Heart At Rest

It is a common notion that peace is a pearl hidden in the path of life, which some men dig for and others stumble upon. There are good people who wish for good luck that they might find this pearl in the road. They make themselves miserable looking for it. They strive and cry and their voices are heard in the streets for peace. But there is no peace. Into their storm-tossed lives no quiet ever comes. And yet all through the Bible there are promises of peace for those who serve the Prince of Peace. "The Lord will bless his people

with peace"; and again, "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever." Search the Book through and you will nowhere find that the Lord will afflict his people with worry, or that the work of righteousness is fret and care, and the effect of righteousness a long face and a turbulent life forever.

What is the secret of a life of peace?

Of course the first essential is to make friends with the Prince of Peace. We must have a sense of pardon. "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." But if the Prince of Peace is to come to our hearts we must give him a quiet place to dwell in. We must cultivate a peaceful frame of mind. If the peace of God is to keep our minds we must keep the peace. There are people who pray for peace who do not know what it is to hold their minds for a moment.

They are constantly committing crimes against the peace and dignity of the kingdom. They court a disturbance. They are never so happy as when they are distracted, or when they have run somebody else distracted. They do not cultivate peaceful ways. They go plunging along without a thought of anybody else's toes; they stand for their rights rather than for right; they never keep their side of the walk; they must always have the last word. They pray for peace and refuse to budge an inch to escape a quarrel. They expect peace, but never try to pacify themselves or anybody else.

If peace is to dwell within we must do what we can to keep the peace without. If we are to be at peace with God we must strive to live peaceably with all men. And we must cultivate the art of peacemaking. A man never gets less peace than he makes for others.

Again, if peace is to dwell within we must make room for it. Many a man has no peace mainly because of the crowded condition of his heart. Here is a heart that belongs to God. God's altar alone has a right there. While the affections are wholly fixed upon God there is peace. But in an evil hour there is erected by this altar an altar to Mammon. When Mammon comes in at the door peace flies out at the window. It is inevitable. When a man tries to worship God and money at the same time, he is on the verge of brain fever. When he erects a third altar—an altar to fame, or appetite—the conflict becomes a ceaseless torment. It is this that keeps many a man tossing at night when he ought to be asleep. Nothing under heaven or in heaven can bring peace into our lives while the strange altars remain.

It is only when we have made room in our hearts that we have an opportunity to

test the promise, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is staid on thee." There is little that can disturb a man whose thoughts are continually of God. "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep; for thou Lord only makest me dwell in safety." Whatever we may do, we will never rest quietly until we are conscious that the Lord is around about us as the walls are around about Jerusalem.

VII

The Way of Life

The highest place in the kingdom of God is the place nearest to God. He is nearest to God whose thoughts, desires and plans revolve closest about God—who is most entirely given up to the service of God. The farthest point from God is the point where a man sets up a god of his own. He who revolves around self, who is given up to self-indulgence or to selfish interests, has made a god of self and is therefore beyond the bounds of the kingdom of heaven. It is just as impossible to cherish self and God too as it is to revolve around two wide-

ly separated points at the same time. He who would be exalted in Christ's kingdom must renounce self and devote himself wholly to the service of Christ. It is not the best office-seeker but the most faithful servant who stands nearest his throne.

It is not a matter for argument. It is a truth which lies deep in the world's consciousness. There is nothing which men so heartily despise as selfishness—in other people; and there is nothing quite so beautiful in the eyes of the world as an unselfish spirit—in other people. The reign of selfishness means the destruction of all that is good and beautiful. A selfish child is repulsive, though it may have the face of a Madonna. There is absolutely no substitute for an unselfish spirit. The self-seeking habit makes us miserable and makes everybody around us miserable. The unselfish heart is a fountain of joy that is constantly overflowing upon the hearts within

its reach. What a benediction to the home is the unselfish child in the midst! If selfishness is outlawed in the kingdom of this world, how much more in the kingdom of God.

The way to life, Jesus tells us, is not through selfishness but through self-sacrifice. The way to honor is through humility. The way to authority is through service. He who saves himself—who counts himself very precious—comes to nothing. He who counts not his life dear unto himself lives forever.

Even nature testifies to this great truth. Suppose a grain of wheat, for example, should choose to save itself. Suppose it should settle down in some safe, sunny place out of reach of hungry mouths, determined to preserve its golden coat and to dwell in peace and comfort. What would become of it? It would simply abide alone. It would not multiply itself, it would do no

good, and it would eventually come to naught. So long as it cherished itself—so long as it sought its own comfort—it would be nothing but a grain of wheat. It would not live; it would simply exist. But suppose one day there should come to this little grain of wheat the ambition to be something, and to do something—the ambition to live, to go abroad, to spread itself out, to clothe the fields in beauty, to feed men, to save life, to comfort the world. What course must it pursue? Is there any way but the way of death? Would it not have to humble itself and drop into the ground, and allow itself to be covered up and lost sight of and forgotten and effaced—would it not have to endure the darkness, the dampness, the loathsomeness of the grave.

How can I turn away from selfishness? There is but one way. Sometimes we say, "I am going to give up this selfish habit;

I am going to give up all selfish indulgence ;” but before the day is over we have forgotten our resolution and we are as selfish as ever. The secret of our failure is in trying to turn away from selfishness without turning toward anything. We cannot turn away from everything. To turn away from one thing effectually, we must turn to another. If we would turn from seeking our own interests, we must turn to seek the interests of another. If we would turn from self, we must turn to God. If we will make him the center of our thoughts, our desires and our plans—if we will revolve around him day by day, we will not need to be concerned about our selfish habits; we will have no selfish habits.

But can we do this by our own strength? By no means. But when we come to this point we have an offer of strength. If a man would simply give up self-seeking, he

must depend on himself; but if he would turn from self to God, he may be sure of help from God.

VIII.

The Condition of Service

The great condition of service is love. The highest preparation for service is love. Other things are needful but love is the essential. It is the one necessary thing. The Master did not say to Peter, "If you have a good common-school education," or "If you have had special theological training," or "If you have had unusual opportunities in life," or "If you occupy such and such a social position," or "If you can arrange your business affairs so that you can give your time to my cause;" he simply asked, "Do you love me?" If Simon loved

him, then Simon could feed his lambs. What a world of encouragement there is here for the poor and the weak among the followers of Jesus. This or that talent may or may not help us to be of service to Jesus, but if we have love we can serve him, whatever we may lack. And so we do not need to take an inventory of our possessions or our opportunities to determine whether we can be of any service to Christ. We have only to take an inventory of our hearts. Have we love in our hearts for him? Love alone may not enable us to preach eloquent sermons, or to do this or that particular form of service, but love will enable us to serve the Master in some way that will be acceptable to him, and that is all we need to know about it. We may always be sure that, whatever may be our condition or our circumstances, if we really love Christ we can be of some sort of service in his kingdom.

We can be and we may be. It is our privilege. Love for Christ gives us a right to serve him. If we love him, it matters not what may be our standing in the world, we have a right to be in his service; we have a right to a place in his vineyard. We may not have a right to this or that particular place, but we have a right to a place. He may choose a high pulpit for the eloquent man who loves him; he may choose an honorable place in a hospital for the talented nurse who loves him; he may not care to use us in either of these places, but if we love him we have a right to some place in his service. If we love him, we may serve him.

And not only may, but must. Love brings its privileges, and it also brings its responsibilities. If I love Jesus my love not only gives me power to serve him, and I not only have the privilege of serving him, but it is my duty to serve him. Love

is compelling. It not merely impels us to give this or that for Jesus; it compels us. The moment we refuse to obey the demands of love, that moment we begin to lose our love. If we love Christ and there are lambs—little ones, weak ones—to be fed, we must feed them. We cannot keep our love for Christ and not feed them. We must feed them or starve our own hearts. If we do feed them, we will feed our love. Love feeds the spirit of obedience, and obedience feeds love. The more we love Christ the more we will obey him, and the more we obey him, the more we will love him.

IX

The Secret of a Fruitful Life

If we have a single worthy aim it is to be saved from an unfruitful life. We have a horror of barrenness here as we have a horror of annihilation hereafter. In our better moments we feel that we would rather die than live at a poor dying rate, though in our ordinary moments we may be living at that rate. We detest the unfruitful man—the sluggard, the non-producer, the parasite—the dehumanized vagabond who does nothing because he is nothing. Where is the man with soul so dead who never to himself hath said, “Heaven helping me, I’ll never be an encumbrance!”

"Now," says Jesus, "if you will abide in me I will save you from a barren existence. I will be to you as a vine to its branches; I will supply you with life, and life in such abundance that the making of fair blossoms in the shape of promises and plans will not exhaust it, but you will be able to bring forth fruit to maturity."

Here, then, is opened before us the way to the realization of our highest ambition. And it is the only way. "Severed from me," says Jesus, "you can do nothing. If you abide not in me you will be as helpless, as lifeless, as fruitless as a cut branch lying upon the ground." There is no other alternative. If we abide in Christ we shall bear fruit because he will supply us with life in such abundance that it will overflow in the form of the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, and the rest—and in the form of good works. Our fingers will be restless with desire to work for him; our

feet to carry messages for him. If we do not abide in him our efforts to be fruitful will be as futile as would be the efforts of a severed branch of the vine to bring forth grapes.

How can we abide in him? If we have accepted him as our Savior and Lord, if we are resting on him, trusting him in all things and for all things, if our hearts are open wide to him so that his life may find its way through our whole being, then we are already abiding in him and he in us. If this intimate relation is to continue unbroken several things are necessary. In the first place we must take the fact of our position into account in all of our conduct. We must "reckon" ourselves branches of the vine. If you have just grafted a twig upon a tree you will so reckon it; you will be governed by the fact in your subsequent dealings with that twig. You will not hang a heavy weight upon it, nor will you pull

it off and try to make it bear fruit by itself. You will have regard for the fact of its position. So in all our conduct we must have regard for the fact of our position as branches in the vine. In the second place we must have regard for the means of grace which help to keep the channels of communication open. We must open the Book and read Christ's word, and open our hearts to receive the word we read; and we must not only thus have him speak to us but we must speak to him. In the third place—and this is the condition upon which our Lord lays so much stress—we must continually obey him in love. If we are disobedient we are disloyal, and it is absurd to suppose that Jesus will set up his throne in a disloyal heart. Unless we love him with a love that obeys we can have no part with him.

The Thing That Counts with God

With God the thing that counts is character. We are always trying to persuade ourselves that it is something else. When you and I were little children we thought that God would not let us perish because "it's me;" and somehow somewhat of that feeling clings to us yet. We feel that it is the "me" that counts. It has clung to the world from the beginning. Each race has felt that it was God's favorite race. Each family in a race has felt that it was God's favorite family. Each man in a family has felt that he was God's favorite man. We

Anglo-Saxons have indulged this conceit until we have become almost absurd in our own eyes. We are sure that we are the people, and that wisdom will die with us; that we live at that particular spot on earth upon which the eyes of God always rest; that we are the peculiar favorites of God because we are white in our faces, without regard to the color of our hearts, and because we have Saxon blood in our veins, without regard to the condition of our blood. Reason about it with ourselves as we may we cannot quite bring ourselves to believe that God at this particular moment may be just as deeply interested in the black man or the brown man or the yellow man or the red man as he is in the white man. We cannot imagine how he can spend much time over the Eskimo or the Chinaman or the Fijian. We take for granted that his thoughts are with the Anglo-Saxons, and we are not quite sure

but that his thoughts are more particularly with the Anglo-Saxons on this side of the sea.

Not being very sure of our character we like to think that other things than character count with God. We like to remember our social position sometimes, and our family history. We persuade ourselves that we cannot perish because we have such good mothers—that we will be saved because of our mothers' prayers, or because we live in a land of Bibles and gospel privileges and go to Sunday-school and to church and have been baptized and have had our names enrolled upon the church book, and all that.

But God is no respecter of persons. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart." Whatever a man may be, wherever he may live, whatever may be his position in life, if he has character—if he fears God and keeps his

commandments as he knows them—that man stands before God with as good an opportunity to reach the ear of God and to obtain the friendship and favor of God as he who has on his side all those things which cause the world to respect a man.

If a man has character he is an approved candidate for the favor of the Lord.

XI

When a Man is Free

“The truth shall make you free.” But not truth as it is popularly understood, nor freedom as the Jews who listened to Jesus understood it. Jesus was accustomed to think on a high plane, and to use words in their higher meanings. He does not mean to say that what people ordinarily call truth in their everyday talk will make a man free indeed. We hear much of the scientist’s search after truth. Every scientist regards himself as a truth-seeker, though he may be only seeking to know the truth about bugs. But one may spend his life

learning the truth about bugs and every other material thing up to the stars, and yet gain no freedom except freedom from ignorance about material things. Indeed, we have seen enthusiasm for material truth utterly enslave a man, and so unfit him for the duties of life that he became a charge on his wife's hands. Jesus was speaking of the truth which came down from heaven—the eternal verities; the deep thoughts of God; the great truths about God and man, of man's relation to God, of God's love for man and his plans to save man—in a word, the things which the Master came from heaven to teach. "If ye continue in these things," he says, "if ye receive these words of mine in your hearts and lives, and let them abide in you and work in you, then ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

There is nothing in the knowledge of material truth to deliver a man out of

spiritual bondage. Material truth has delivered men out of material bondage—it has set men to inventing labor-saving machinery, and doing things according to the best methods, and thus delivered them from being hewers of wood and drawers of water; but it has never broken the smallest thread that has helped to hold the soul down. A man may become a walking cyclopedia and remain a slave to sin. There is nothing in human experience to encourage the idea that man is to be saved by education. He that would be delivered out of material bondage must learn material truth, but he that would be delivered from spiritual bondage must learn spiritual truth. Learn the truth about material things—learn the great laws of the material world—and you shall be free from the slavery of superstition and hard, primitive modes of living. Learn the truth about the moral universe—the great laws of the

spiritual world—and you shall be free from the slavery of sin; and then you shall be free indeed.

But let there be no mistake. The freedom which Jesus promises is the higher, spiritual freedom, just as the truth he speaks of is the higher, spiritual truth. He does not promise that if we will become his disciples he will free us from physical bondage—though the tendency of the gospel is to break chains of every sort. He does not promise to deliver us from the bondage of physical suffering or poverty or skeletons in the family closet—though he often does deliver men from each and all of these things. He does not promise to take us away from our present surroundings so that we will have no temptation to sin. But he does promise to deliver us from the power of sin, that we may rise above all these things even to the point of glorying in our infirmities.

And remember, it is not the truth by itself—the abstract truth—that shall make us free; it is the Son of Man who by the truth shall make us free. “If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

XII

The Worship of Success

The god of yesterday was money. The god of to-day is success. Within a decade men have come to worship success more than money. They would rather succeed in what they undertake—rather “get there,” rather be known as a “winner”—than be rated at a million. Of course, most of us like both. We would rather succeed in getting money than in getting anything else; but the standard we have set up for ourselves is success, and we would rather succeed in whatever we undertake than anything else, whether the undertaking is for money or not.

Is this new god we have set up any improvement on the old? Are we not in as great danger in worshiping success as we have been in worshiping money? Is success the true aim of life? Is it not better to fail sometimes than to succeed always? Is the successful game always worth the candle? Is success the true measure of a man?

It is well to pause and look at this matter from the standpoint of God himself as we have it in his Word. Take the case of David, for example. David wanted to build God a house. It did not coincide with Jehovah's plans and he did not build it. He failed in a thing that lay very near to his heart. But God honored him as highly as if he had carried out his heart's desire. He honored him for what he wanted to do, for what he purposed to do, for what he would have done if he could. God wants us to succeed in many of our undertakings,

but he would not have us look at achievement as the true aim of life. The highest aim is not to come out a winner but to be faithful to the end. It is not so much what a man does as how he behaves in trying to do it. If he is faithful to God, if he would rather be right than be President, if he is faithful to his fellowmen, if he is faithful to his highest impulses, if he utterly refuses to sacrifice a principle or a friend or even an enemy that he may gain his end, it is not a great matter whether he achieves or not. He has succeeded in being a man if he has not succeeded in his undertaking. A man may succeed and be a great failure. A man may fail and be a great success. Moses failed to reach Canaan, but nobody calls Moses a failure. Nero succeeded in having his own way, but nobody calls Nero a success. Men have tried to be President and have failed and have gone down to their graves as America's greatest suc-

cesses. Men have tried to be President and succeeded and gone down to their graves—not as America's greatest successes.

Let us engrave on our hearts the precious truth that it is the privilege of every man, whatever his talents or opportunities, to be faithful; that he who is faithful is a success whether he succeeds in his undertakings or not; that success is never worth achieving at the expense of one's faithfulness; that if one succeeds who has not been faithful the golden apple will turn to ashes between his teeth; that if he fails, having been faithful, he has the consciousness of the friendship of Him to whom he has been faithful.

XIII

Making A Choice

To live is to choose. It is not a matter of choice whether one shall choose or not. We are continually coming to places where two roads meet, and we must choose between them. We may choose what we will, but we cannot choose not to choose.

The great question on the threshold of life is, What shall I choose? Suppose God should come and spread out before me all the treasures of heaven and earth—what would I choose? What ought I to choose? Certainly common sense teaches me that I ought to choose that which will satisfy me

longest and that which I can never possibly regret. Now suppose we take these two rules and measure some of the things which are set before us.

First, there is fame. There are two questions to ask about fame: Will it satisfy me longer than anything else? Is it a choice which I can never possibly regret? These two questions are easily answered. I have never known a man who had achieved fame that did not feel in his latter years that the game was not worth the candle—that he had paid too dearly for his whistle. And I have never known a man who had struggled for fame who did not regret at some time that he had not chosen another sphere of life. A man enters politics to become famous. In the struggle which follows he neglects his own private affairs and becomes overwhelmed with debt. Then he realizes that instead of becoming famous he is in imminent danger of becoming in-

famous, and he begins to say to himself, that he would rather have money than all the fame in the world. He is sure that if a man has money he can do anything.

But suppose I choose money? Will money satisfy me longer than anything else? Is the pursuit of wealth a choice which I can never possibly regret. A man who feels that money is king starts out to earn it by hook or by crook. And he earns it by hook and crook. He thinks that if he can get enough money he can do anything, but in the struggle he brings a stain upon his name and his family is ostracized. Then he struggles harder, not because he cares for money, but because he hopes that if he can get a little more the world will be persuaded that his wife and children are respectable, and give him the social position he so much desires. He would rather be accounted respectable than have all the money in the world, and he dies regretting

that instead of starting out to get rich he had not started out to secure the respect of his fellowman.

But suppose I choose social position? Will it satisfy me longer than anything else? Is the pursuit of a high place in society a choice which I can never possibly regret? It all looks very beautiful at a distance but who that has risen to that exclusive circle that soars far above the heads of ordinary people, has not grown weary of its demands, weary of its shallowness, weary of its heartlessness, and has longed for some obscure quiet spot where he could dwell under his own vine and fig-tree with none to molest or make him afraid?

There are a dozen other things which one might choose—not one that will continue to satisfy; not one the choice of which we will not eventually regret—if we choose it as the chief thing. Among all the treasures spread out before mortal man

there is but one that will satisfy him forever, one the choice of which (as the chief thing) he can never regret.

What is this one Supreme Treasure?

If I choose Christ as my savior and lord—if I open my heart to him; if I enthrone him in my heart as my king; if I allow myself to be dominated by him—I shall be satisfied, and I shall be satisfied forever. It matters not what may happen, the Spirit-filled life is the one continually satisfying thing. And since the beginning of time no man who has made this choice has ever been known to regret it.

XIV

My Two Natures

Here are two natures, the flesh and the spirit—the lower nature that is given up to the gratification of the senses, and the higher nature that reaches out after spiritual things. These two natures are utterly contrary to each other. They cannot dwell together; they have nothing in common with each other. To feed the one is to starve the other. To lift up the one is to pull down the other. One must rule supreme, and the question which every man must decide is which one. Shall I look after my lower nature—follow where it

leads, seek to fulfill its desires—or shall I give myself to my higher nature?

Paul says that I am not a debtor to my lower nature; what I owe, I owe to the higher. "I am a debtor not to the flesh, but to the spirit." He does not mean to say that I do not owe food to my body, that I should not take care of my body, but that I am under no obligation whatever to gratify the tendencies of my lower nature. Why should I gratify these tendencies when they all lead to death? Why should I give myself up to that which must die, and which must eventually bring me to eternal death? I have no obligation in this direction. There is no reason in the world why I should give myself up to the gratification of the desires of my lower nature. My lower nature is my enemy. It pulls me downward. If I follow where it leads it will eventually lead me down to eternal death.

On the other hand my spiritual nature—this spirit within me which yearns after the spiritual—is my friend. Its tendency is upward. It aspires after the Great Spirit. It is the best of me. My lower nature is death. My higher nature is life. It reaches out after God; and when my spirit is united with the Spirit of God, all its aspirations and movements are toward God and toward eternal good. Following the desires of my lower nature I shall find death; following the aspirations of my higher nature I shall find life. If God so loved me as to give his Son to come down into the world and condemn this lower nature, and put his Spirit in my heart, and give me power to gain the victory over this lower nature, and to live according to his Spirit, and to become a son of God, then surely all my obligations are toward my higher nature. The business of my life is to feed my higher nature. The business of my life

is to mind the things of the Spirit and not the things of the flesh ; to think the highest, noblest thoughts ; to aspire after the highest things ; to walk after the pattern which God has given me in the life of his Son ; to give myself up to thinking, feeling, aspiring, acting on the highest spiritual plane. He who does this is a son of God. So long as I follow the tendencies of my lower nature I am a slave, and the chains tighten about me as I go on downward. If I will let Christ come into my heart ; if I will turn my back upon sin ; if I will choke to death these lower desires ; if I will open my heart to be led by the Spirit of God—he will not only set me free, but he will adopt me as his own son. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

The Victorious Life

Here are two young men who have started out to be Christians. They are both honest in their purpose and equally in earnest. Both go regularly to church and Sunday-school, both read their Bibles daily, and both are frequent in prayer. Yet to one life is a long drawn-out battle; to the other life has its battles, but it also has its victories. To one the effort to live a Christian life is one continual strain; to the other there is a joyful consciousness in the midst of every struggle of an arm upholding and helping him. One pauses now and

then to wipe the sweat from his brow, and to ask whether after all life is worth living; the other cries, "For me to live is Christ; to die is gain." One cries out in despair: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The other shouts as he runs: "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." One weeps with bowed head; the other may weep, but with upturned face toward the Sun of Righteousness. To one the Christian life is a burden; to the other it is a triumph.

What is the secret of the difference between these two young men? Simply this. One has repented of his sins and has started out with the determination to lead a new life. He knows not how to lead a new life except by his own strength, and he starts out trusting in his own will-power. He believes in Christ as the Savior of men, and he believes that if he is faithful unto the

end Christ will save him at the end. He has accepted Christ as his lord, his king, his ruler, but he thinks of him as a king sitting upon a throne in heaven. In a word, he believes in Christ as a future Savior. The other has repented of his sins, and started out with equal determination to lead a new life, but he realizes at the beginning that there is no use trying if he must depend upon his own feeble arm. He has tried that before. He cannot be his own savior, and there has come to him the blessed revelation that the Christ in whom he has been asked to believe is not merely the lord, the ruler, the king of men, but that he has come into the world to be the present Savior of men; that while he returned to heaven after the resurrection, he descended again in the person of the Holy Spirit; that the Holy Spirit present in the world and in the hearts of men to-day is the present Christ. He has realized that

Jesus, the all-sufficient Savior from all sin, is at his right hand ready to enter into his heart, to take possession of his life, to strengthen every nerve and every muscle, to fight for him and through him, to overcome his temptations, to give strength to him in his weariness, to give health to him in his sickness, and to enlighten him in his darkness. He has realized that Christ, the complete satisfier of all his wants, is at his side ready to meet all his deficiencies, and to be his sufficiency in all things; and he has opened his heart and given himself up to Christ his present Savior. And so in the hour of weakness, instead of fainting and crying out in despair, he looks up and claims Christ's strength and Christ gives him strength. In the hour of temptation, instead of entering into the fight single-handed he turns his eyes toward Christ and claims the promise of his strength for the hour of temptation, and the strength of

Christ takes possession of him, and fights his battle and wins his victory. He has his struggles, he has his heartaches, he has his sorrows, but in all things he has the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

XVI

A Well Armed Man

Here is a young man who is making a brave effort to live a noble life. He has accepted Christ and he is struggling to keep true to his profession. But everything is against him. His friends are all trying to lead him astray. He is teased continually. He cannot even say his prayers in peace. Every imp of Satan is pointing his finger at him. He is persecuted for Christ's sake just as truly as the early Christians were persecuted. Then, too, he is struggling with all sorts of temptations. The boys are going off to have a good

time. He knows what that good time means. He has been with them before and he knows that a Christian cannot have that sort of a good time. Yet, he wants to go. There are many things that make it a hardship to stay behind, and it is hard to say "no." Every day he meets some new temptation, and sometimes he overcomes it and sometimes it overcomes him. He is conscious that he is too weak for the battle. He needs a stronger armor of defense. What is the strongest defensive armor for a persecuted young man? You will find it in I Peter iv:2:

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

Sometimes we arm ourselves with good resolutions. Sometimes we arm ourselves with the thought that it is too cowardly to go back after starting out for Christ. Sometimes we strengthen our backbone by ask-

ing what So-and-so will say? But these things are not strong enough for times of real persecution. There is but one thing that is strong enough: it is to be armed with the mind which Christ armed himself. Just as our Lord, when he was about to come down among us, determined out of pure love for us, to suffer even unto death for our sakes, so we should arm ourselves, out of pure love for him, with the determination to suffer even unto death for his sake. The reason why it is so hard to bear, to endure, to suffer hardships for Christ is, because we have never settled this matter in our own minds. Our love for him has never moved us to decide that we would suffer for him even unto death. Because Christ loved us he determined to suffer unto death for us. Having settled this matter at the beginning he bore the sufferings which came upon him almost as a matter of course. It never occurred to him to

cry out, "How much more shall I endure?" He never exclaimed, "When will patience cease to be a virtue!" No man ever heard him say, "I am willing to bear my part, but enough of a thing is enough." He did not come to us with the intention of drinking as much of the cup of suffering as he could and letting the rest go. He came determined to drink the very dregs. And he drank the dregs.

This is the spirit which you and I must have if we are going to quit ourselves like men. We have played baby long enough. We have had no strength to endure simply because we have had no mind for it. Our mind has been to run from suffering, and when we were overtaken to cry as babies cry. If Christ had set his mind on himself rather than on us he, too, would have cried out. If we will set our minds on him rather than on ourselves we will count it a privilege to be permitted to suffer for his

sake. Is the idea clear? The bottom secret is love. That young man is happy when he is permitted to suffer for the woman he loves—if he loves her. That mother is happy to suffer for the child she loves—if she loves him. That man is happy to suffer for the Christ he loves—if he really loves him.

XVII

Consecration vs. Annihilation

It is a common notion that consecration is the equivalent of annihilation. We are in the habit of saying that men hesitate to give themselves wholly to God because they are afraid it will cost them their pleasure, but there are many who hesitate out of fear that it will cost them their very existence. We know good people who hold on to an uncomfortable position with one foot on the altar and the other on the earth lest if they should lift the other foot on the altar they would literally cease to be. They share the common instinct that shudders at

the thought of dropping into oblivion, and they have not advanced to that refinement of ambition that seeks to be absorbed in Nirvana.

The phraseology, if not the teaching, of certain modern apostles of the higher life is perhaps largely responsible for the prevalence of this notion. We are told that when we surrender ourselves to the Lord we resign in his favor and that he immediately assumes our place and does our work for us. We are to give up everything, even to trying. We are to stand still with our eyes closed, and wait for the Holy Spirit to hypnotize us and lead us by an irresistible influence. And we are assured that if we will stand very still and keep perfectly quiet and not peep, we will surely feel this influence, just as a blindfolded man is said to feel an impulse in the particular direction agreed upon by the mesmerists who place their hands upon him.

The chief trouble about this sort of teaching is that it is not scriptural. God is our sufficiency, and we are nowhere taught that he is our substitute. When we consecrate ourselves to him we are not asked to renounce our names, to drop ourselves into the sea of oblivion, and to cast the talents he has given us to the winds. When we come to God we bring to him the workmanship of his own hands. God is not extravagant. He does not make men and then throw them away. He does not give us the power to do a thing and then insist that we shall throw away that power and look to him to do it. The Holy Spirit comes not to take the place of what we have, but to meet all our deficiencies. In consecrating ourselves to God we need not fear that we will have to give up anything that he has given us. A consecrated man is not less than a man, but more.

XVIII

The Source of Power

Stripped of all technicalities, enthusiasm, mysticism and hair-splitting, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is that Jesus has promised that the Father will give to those of us who obey him in love "another Comforter," who shall abide with us, and be to us for all time what Jesus himself was to his disciples during his earthly ministry. In a word, if we obey him in love we shall have no occasion to envy the disciples who saw him in the flesh, for the Holy Spirit will be to us a present Christ and he will abide with us forever.

Let us see if we can realize what this means. Here are a hundred and twenty followers of Jesus—plain, obscure men and women praying and waiting. Well may they wait, for there is no one in the entire band who has the power to take the first step in the great work which the Master has planned for them. And well may they pray, for if the power they need does not come from heaven there is no hope that it will come from anywhere else. There is no man in authority who is going to throw the weight of his influence in their behalf; there is no powerful organization coming to their help; there is no hope that they will have the aid of the influence that comes from wealth or social position. They are set apart for a great work; they are to be the instruments of supernatural power; but now they are powerless. They are but dead wires.

Suddenly the Holy Spirit enters their

hearts. It is like the rushing of an electric current into a wire that has been prepared to furnish light and power. Before the current is turned on the wire is dead; the next moment the electric fluid bursts into dazzling light and sets every wheel going. But a little while ago they forsook their Master in his hour of trial. A little while ago Peter found himself too weak to endure the scorn of a servant girl. A little while ago they were not bold enough to whisper the name of the Master outside of the upper room. They did not have the courage; they did not have the knowledge; they did not have the magnetism; they did not have anything which they peculiarly needed for their work. Now the men who fled from Gethsemane to escape arrest go forth and arrest the attention of the great multitude that would have crucified them with their leader. Now even Peter, who had denied his Master and backed up his denial by

oaths, stands forth as strong as a giant, and dares to charge the men of Jerusalem with slaying his Lord.

What does all this mean. Simply that the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, is our light and our power; that without him, whatever may be our equipment, we are but dead wires; that with him we may have all the light and the power we need. Yesterday we went forth to the day's tasks, praying that we might walk as Christ our example would have us walk. There came a time when we did not know which way to turn; we needed light. There came a time when we grew weak in the face of duty; another moment, and we stumbled from sheer weakness of soul. All the day long we denied our Master; not in so many words like Peter, and yet we denied him, for all the day long our actions said that we did not know Jesus. Last night we wept bitterly on our pillows and wondered if to

live means to fail in everything we try to do. What was the matter? We were but dead wires. What will give us courage for to-day? What will give us light that we may not stumble in the way? To whom shall we go but to him who has promised the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, who will guide us into all truth?

XIX

The Lowly in Heart

Humility was a rare virtue among the Jews in Jesus' day. The seeds of vanity and conceit diligently sown by the rabbis through generations had yielded a nation of coxcombs. One true-blue Jew, to their thinking, was worth more in the sight of God than all the heathen on the face of the earth. The Jews of Judea were better than the Jews of Galilee; the rich Jews were better than the poor Jews; the elders were better than the people, and every Jew was better than every other Jew. The most unattractive thing about Jesus was his humil-

ity. Even his disciples were slow to take his yoke upon them and learn of him, for they did not want to learn that he was meek and lowly in heart.

Breathing such an atmosphere, it was natural that the chosen twelve should allow themselves to think that they were superior to the other disciples, and it was just as natural that James and John should imagine that they were worthy of greater honors than the rest of the twelve. And why should not their mother think so too?

But the very fact that it was natural made it all the more dangerous, and our Lord lost no time in showing these men their peril and pointing out a better way. Such a spirit, he told them plainly, was of the earth earthly. Heathen kings were accustomed to contend for place and to lord it over men, and among little men of the world the man who lorded it over others was called a benefactor; but that was not

the way in which it would be looked upon in his kingdom. There is no greatness in sticking one's self upon a pedestal to receive the enforced homage of the great or the voluntary homage of the small. No man is great who calls himself great, or insists on being regarded as great. The ambition to lord it over others is born only in small men. True greatness shows itself in service. It is service. In the eyes of God and in the judgment of all good men the man who sets himself up, sets himself up because he is too small to be seen otherwise. That man is great who serves and thereby deserves to be enshrined in the hearts of the people, whether he is enshrined or not. In a word, that man is great who most resembles Christ, the servant of men.

But let us make no mistake about Christ. He is our humble servant, not a humiliated servant. The picture of the Master wash-

ing his disciples' feet is a picture of humility, not a picture of humiliation. It is strange that we should so often mistake one for the other when there is no real resemblance between them. Many a young man will not come to Christ because he has got it into his head that a life of service is inimicable to one's self-respect. Humility is not a stooping to unworthy things; it is not that spirit which leads us to do anything we are ashamed of. It is simply love having its way in lowly spheres. Jesus washed his disciples' feet because he loved his disciples to the uttermost. If you love your child a little you will serve him in some things, but you will have a servant to attend to lowly duties. But if you love your child unto the uttermost you will find delight in serving him in lowly ways; and when he is very sick and your love is thereby drawn out to the utmost you will want to do the utmost for him with your own

hands; and you will delight in doing for him things which you would be ashamed to do for one whom you loved less. Humility has no connection with shame; where shame is there is only humiliation.

Again, humility is opposed to ostentation. Strangely enough this act of Jesus has been interpreted as a theatrical exhibition. We are given to interpreting other people's acts by our own feelings, and we remember how on one occasion when there was an humble duty to perform and everyone shrank from it—we remember how we stepped forward and said that we would like for them to know that we were not too proud to do it. But when we put such a thought as this in the mind of Jesus the story loses all of its beauty and becomes a pitiful exhibition of vanity. Humility dies the moment it begins to advertise. Nay, it dies with the thought of advertising. The proudest man among us is the man who is

always reminding people how humble he is; for the proudest man living is the man who is proud of his humility.

Heart Questions About Prayer

If I were asked what is the most pitiful picture that human eyes ever looked upon I would doubtless recall a certain vision of a poor little baby waif—a tiny castaway who had no mother's eyes into which it might look. But if I should take time to consider it would probably come to me that after all the case of this little castaway is not the most pitiful in the world. It is not so pitiful, for example, as that of a big, full-grown man I know who, in his hours of helplessness, has no Heavenly Father's

eyes into which he may look. That man is the world's most wretched castaway.

A baby must look up into its mother's eyes or into the eyes of one who may take the mother's place; denied this privilege it will soon cease to live. A man must look up into the face of God; denied this privilege he is already dead.

This looking up into the face of God is what we call prayer. For prayer, when we come to think of it, is simply conscious helplessness looking up to the source of help. It is not a matter of words. It is true we are accustomed to say that prayer is the language of faith; but faith, like love, can speak without the tongues of men or of angels. Prayer is not the mere saying of one's little speech to God on set occasions. It is the very breath of one's life—the outpouring of the heart's desire and the heart's gratitude continually to God. We do not know the meaning of prayer until

we have formed the habit of breathing out toward God.

There are two familiar texts which, if kept in mind, will answer nearly all the questions our hearts are asking about prayer.

The first is the assurance of the Psalmist: "Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." How does a wise, loving father who has unlimited means to do as he wishes treat his children? We know that there are many things which he is glad to do for his most wayward children. He will see that they have food and clothing, and he will do much to keep them out of trouble and everything to get them out of trouble when they have fallen in. But there are many things which he loves to do for his obedient children. A loving, obedient boy can go to such father with perfect confidence that his father is always ready to do the best for

him. He does not give him everything he asks for because he knows the boy better than the boy knows himself, and he is more concerned over his boy's welfare than his boy is concerned for himself. But if he does not do what his boy wants he does not turn a deaf ear to his cry. He will seek other ways to satisfy him and often he delights in doing far more for him than he has hoped for. He is not going to give him anything that will hurt him. If he asks for bread he will not mock him by giving him a stone. If he asks for wholesome food, as a fish or an egg, he will not give him a serpent or a scorpion to poison him. Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Recall the questions you have been asking about prayer and look at them in the light of this saying. Will God hear us when we cry? Yes; for he is our Father. Will he give us everything that we ask for? No; for he is

our Father. Why does God allow the sun to shine and the rain to fall upon the unjust as well as the just? Because God is our Father. Does God make a difference so that those who obey him may go to him with the assurance which one who does not obey him cannot have? Yes; for God is our Father. You and I can trust a wise and loving father who has unlimited means to do all that his love and wisdom prompt him to do. Can we not trust God who is our wise and loving Father and who has unlimited means to do all that his love and wisdom prompt him to do?

The other text is from Hebrews vii: 25: "Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Does God hear my prayer? Does he understand my case? Does he know my circumstances? Does he think of my needs? Alas! my prayers are not worth hearing, and I don't understand my own case, and I am thinking of my wishes

rather than my needs. What hope is there that a poor mortal may enter for one moment into the thought of God? One may answer, God is love and therefore he does not forget. But there are times when the throne of God seems so far off, and I say, "Oh, if I only had some one to look after my case at court!" That is just what Christ is doing in heaven to-day. "He ever liveth to make intercession." He is there with our cases on his heart and on his mind. He is there to represent us. He is there to plead with the Father for us. He comes between us and the Father, not to separate us, indeed, not because the Father would not draw near to us, but to bind us together. He is our high priest. I do not understand that this means that God our Father is far away from us, that we need to have a representative at court lest he should forget us, that he would not understand our cases if Christ did not tell him

all about us ; it simply means that we need not have the slightest fear concerning God as to whether he will hear our prayer, or whether he understands our case, or whether he knows our circumstances, or whether he enters into our needs ; but we may pray, if we pray as we ought, with perfect assurance that our petitions will not fall short of his ear. If our case is peculiar, we may be sure that he knows it, for we have an Advocate at court. If we have any real need we may be sure that he knows what it is, "for he ever liveth to make intercession."

XXI

Judging Others

There are at least four good reasons why we should not sit in judgment upon others. In the first place, we are unfit to be judges, for the reason that we look on the outward appearance and not on the heart. In the second place, the habit of judging people destroys the spirit of charity, and feeds the flame of hate within us. In the third place, it blinds us more and more to our own faults. In the fourth place, it is utterly futile, for the reason that we look for faults in others, hoping thereby to minify or blot out our own. After all, why should

we judge others when we have so many faults ourselves? It is notorious that those who are so quick to speak of the motes in other people's eyes have great, blinding beams in their own eyes. It is the fault-finder who is fullest of faults. Why should we be so deeply concerned about other people's motes and so little concerned about our own beams? Will pulling motes out of other people's eyes get the beams out of our own? Nay, nay; let us be a little selfish until he have—to change the figure—swept before our own doors. Let us get the beams out of our own eyes and then shall we see clearly to pull the mote out of our brother's eye; though it is likely, when we are able to see how small the mote is, we will not be so bent on getting it out.

But Jesus would not have us go to the other extreme of exaggerated charity, which some superior saints affect. He

would not have us so charitable that we would refuse to see the wolf that comes to us often hidden in sheep's clothing. He would not have us hide our eyes from the cloven foot when the devil comes to us an angel of light. He does not ask the good mother to imagine that the vile scab who wants to visit her daughter is every inch a gentleman. He would not have us under obligations to show our charity for show-people of doubtful character by giving them the encouragement of our presence, even if the ticket costs us nothing. He does not move the hearts of fair women to send bouquets and perfumed notes to condemned murderers. We are not to turn away from our own faults and look for the faults of others, but on the other hand, we must not turn away from the fact that if the fruit is not good the tree is corrupt.

XXII

How Often Shall I Forgive?

It is not a question of mathematics; it is a question of love. Love does not take note of its own good deeds or of another's evil deeds; it is malice that keeps a memorandum of such things. It is not enough to forgive a man seven times or seventy times seven. What Jesus wants is the spirit that cherishes no evil against any man, that refuses to harbor any bitterness, and is always ready and always seeking to live in love and charity with all men. There is never an occasion for asking how often one shall forgive, when one shall forgive, or

under what circumstances one shall forgive. The only question is, Shall I at any time, or under any circumstances, or for the smallest moment, admit into my heart any ill-feeling toward my neighbor? Never! says Jesus. And he gives us a reason. We, too, are offenders, and we are looking to God continually for forgiveness. And he forgives us. If our Father in heaven, who is too holy to look upon sin, can forgive us, utterly unworthy as we are, surely we cannot afford to refuse to forgive any one of his creatures.

It is sometimes said that we are not required to forgive other until they ask our forgiveness, because God does not forgive us until we ask forgiveness, and God would not require us to go further than he does. But who are we that we should thus compare ourselves with God? Who are we that we should put on such fine airs and think ourselves so high and of such dignity

that those who offend us must fall at our feet and sue for mercy, as if they had offended their creator, upon whom they were dependent for every need? The man who offends me is my brother—my equal—not my servant, who receives his life and all that he has from my hands. And I—given as I am to offending others, and the more given to offending God himself—why should I stand at a great distance and curl the lip with scorn and declare that I will not forgive my enemy until he comes and sues for peace? Why should I set myself up as a superior being, whose offended dignity can only be satisfied by the humiliation of the offender?

But even admitting that we are at liberty to enthrone ourselves above our enemies and require them to come to us and plead for forgiveness, as we say God requires of his enemies, it may be further answered that while God does not pardon

those who refuse to ask for pardon, he never for a single moment cherishes in his heart the feelings which you and I are disposed to cherish against those whom we refuse to forgive. If we wish to follow God in the matter of forgiving our enemies, let us follow him in this: let us keep from our hearts all bitterness against the offender and seek continually, as God by his Holy Spirit seeks, to win the offender to our hearts.

XXIII

The Unruly Member

When you and I grow old we are going to sit down some day and say: "I've had a good many troubles in my time, but after all I am responsible for most of them myself." And some of us are going to add: "Most of the troubles which I brought upon myself came through my tongue and my temper." This is what nearly all the old people we know have learned, now that they have grown old. The pity of it is that they did not learn it while they were young. Why may you and I not learn it while we are young?

A large part of the trouble that comes to the average man or woman in a life time comes through the tongue or the temper. If this is true surely one of the most vital questions you and I can ask is, How can I get control of my tongue and my temper?

Jesus tells us how.

As for the tongue, he says, the important thing is to let one's communications be, Yea, yea; nay, nay. He does not mean that we should confine our speech to yes and no. This old world would be insufferable if the followers of Jesus did that. What he means is that we should say yes when we mean yes and no when we mean no, and not seek to bolster up our yes or no with oaths or lies or extravagances of any sort. In a word we should rule our tongues and not let them rule us. James dwells upon this idea in his epistle. If your tongue rules you, he says, it will ruin you; if you

rule it, it will be a blessing to you and to all around you. For this little member is a tremendous power—like the little bit with which we manage horses, and the little rudder with which we guide ships. You might harness up every muscle of a horse to the big wheel of an engine, and you could not, with all the steam power you could use, manage him so well as you could manage him with a tiny bit in his mouth; nor could a thousand men do for a ship what one little rudder under the control of one man could do. It is a frightful thing to see a horse running away, with the reins on the ground; it is pitiful to see a great ship tossing helplessly about in the sea without a rudder. But it is both frightful and pitiful to see a man's tongue tossing to and fro, or running away for want of somebody to control it. The tongue is a little thing, but in its very littleness lies much of its danger. It is like the spark that kindles the flame that burns a city.

The world has had so much good advice concerning the abuse of the tongue that some pious folk have concluded that this little member is an incurably wicked thing, put into the world for no good purpose except to exercise patience in holding it. There are many really good people whose highest ambition in life is to be able to hold their tongues. They don't want to be anything in the positive, but they want to be something in the negative; they want to be as harmless as posts, forgetting how harmful a post may be when it is in people's way. "If I can only manage to say nothing wrong," is their soul's deepest cry. And so, while the world is cursed with bad tongues loose at both ends, it suffers because there are so many good tongues tied at both ends. Everyone knows some good woman who rarely says anything for fear she might make a mistake. She would like to speak a comforting word to a bereaved

neighbor, but she is afraid she will say something she ought not, and so tear the wound afresh. She would like to tell the minister how helpful his sermons have been to her, but she is afraid she will spoil him. And so she holds her tongue day by day, smothering her best impulses and starving because she will not give.

If a friend should give you a mettlesome young horse, would you tie him to a post and let him stay there a lifetime for fear if you should try to drive him he might run away? Would you not buy a good, stout harness, with a good stiff bit, and train him for service?

Can a man's tongue serve the purpose for which it was made if it is kept tied to the roof of his mouth? Are we exhorted to tie our tongues? Are we not rather urged to bridle them that we may use them?

As for the temper, the important thing, Jesus teaches us, is to renounce forever

that which many of us have learned to regard as the sweetest privilege of life—the privilege of retaliation. Have you ever noticed that when a man is more concerned about standing up for the right than he is for his rights you rarely find him engaged in giving a free exhibition of his temper? Look at that little child who has thrown himself upon the floor in a fit of rage. What is the matter? Somebody has gotten in the way of his rights. The little fellow has been made to feel from the beginning that all things revolve about him; that sun and moon and papa and mamma were made for him; and this has developed in him the habit of always looking out for his rights; not for right—he cares nothing for that; nor for your rights—he cares nothing for that; but for his rights. And this habit of standing up always for his rights and demanding on all occasions an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth has fed his tem-

per until now he falls to pieces at the slightest provocation. Suppose one day he should suddenly awake to the utter folly of retaliation—what a change would come over his temper! It is the spirit of retaliation that keeps the temper at the exploding point. The very moment one renounces the privilege of revenge—the moment he decides to stand up for the right and let God take care of his rights—that moment will he cease to be the slave of his temper.

XXIV

The Hour of Temptation

It is one thing to be tempted, another thing to fall. We are not responsible for what the temper has to do with us ; we are only responsible for what we have to do with him. With this thought in mind there is nothing to disturb us in the fact that Jesus could be tempted. We say that God cannot be tempted and we say well, for God has all things and can desire nothing ; there is nothing with which to tempt him. But when Jesus took upon himself our nature he subjected himself to our limitations, and one of man's limitations is pov-

erty; he is dependent on God for everything. Jesus was in need; he had renounced the power to provide for himself and any good thing presented before him would naturally awaken desire. Note that Satan tempts men with good things as well as with evil, and that in tempting Jesus he offered only such things as were in themselves good. He knew better than to waste his time with offers of evil things—things which would awaken no desire in a pure heart.

It is not a sin to be tempted nor is it anything against our good name that Satan should try to overcome us. We are sometimes perplexed by his visits; we think he ought to know what is in us and we feel humiliated, just as we would if a man should offer to bribe us. But Satan, like death, loves a shining mark; he does not trouble himself about those he is already sure of, or about those who can do him no

harm ; he attacks those who get in his way. The man who is never tempted is either half dead or is living in such a way as to satisfy the temper. Jesus was not only tempted like as we are, but being the devil's worst enemy he was subjected to his fiercest and most violent assaults.

But while it is not a sin to be tempted it is a sin to deliberately put ourselves in the way of temptation. So long as we have nothing to do with the temptation we are not responsible for it, but when we help out the tempter by meeting him half-way, we must expect at least to share the responsibility with him. Jesus did not go into the wilderness to be tempted. He was not impatient to measure swords with the prince of darkness. He was led by the Spirit. And being led by the Spirit it mattered little whether he was led into a wilderness among the wild beasts, or brought in contact with the devil, or both. We are not

to walk in a lion's den on our own will counting upon God's protection, but if we are led by the Spirit we may go with the assurance that the mouths of the lions have been closed.

But how can I overcome temptation? I wish we would not always ask this question so hopelessly but would really look for an answer. In the story of the temptation in the wilderness you will find the Master's own method. This method you will notice is remarkable not only for its simplicity but for its brevity. A successful method with temptation must be a short one. Time is one of the devil's best friends. If he can only persuade us to stop awhile and talk over matters he will feel quite sure of his game; for he is better at an argument than we are—he has been at the business so long—and while he is arguing we forget ourselves, and he has a chance to let fly a tiny dart now and then at the joints

of our armor. What is done must be done quickly. Jesus puts it all in one short sentence. He does not argue, he does not parley, he does not suggest any "ifs" or "ands"; he simply quotes a word of Scripture. In other words, when the devil makes known his will, Jesus instantly thinks of his Father's will and brings it forward. This silences Satan on the matter in hand, if it does not entirely vanquish him.

Now let us take Jesus as our example in this as in all other things. To overcome temptation let us do as he did—let us turn our thoughts instantly toward the Father. Let us drive the devil's thoughts out of our minds with the Father's thoughts. Let us ask, not, What would this or that friend have me do? but, What would God have me do? What does my Bible say?

Sweetening Our Pleasures

The simple folk of Cana won immortal distinction by inviting Jesus to share their pleasures. It was a beautiful thing to do, though I imagine if they had really known who he was they would have been just like the rest of us—they would not have invited him. How quick we are to invite the Son of God to the house of mourning, and yet who thinks of inviting him to the house of rejoicing? We share with him our pains, but never our pleasures. We feel the need of him in our troubles, but we feel that we can get along in our sunny hours

without him. At any rate we do not see how he can help us. And so it happens that even in the most innocent pleasures of life we manage to get along without his presence.

We even leave him out of the pleasures of the home. And yet he who had no place to lay his head dearly loved a home. For he believed in the home, and in all those relationships which make the home—which open our hearts; which awaken love and sympathy and sacrifice; which make us patient and forbearing; which give present joy and turn our thoughts to never-fading joys.

I wonder if this habit of leaving Jesus out of our pleasures is not the reason why we get along so poorly in our pleasures. I wonder if it is not why so many of our pleasures turn out badly—why the most innocent recreations so often lead us into sin—why so many pleasures that are inno-

cent in themselves have become so dangerous that we can hardly afford to have anything to do with them at all.

The simple folk of Cana invited Jesus to their wedding and his presence was a blessing to them. He helped them when they were in trouble; he saved them from humiliation. He added to their happiness, for his goodness we may be sure was not the sort that is likely to spoil a wedding festival. He honored them by his presence and we may be sure that they were not led away by the pleasures of the hour as they might have been led away if he had not been present. If you and I felt the need of our Lord's direction in our pleasures as well as in our troubles, would not our pleasures in life be sweeter and purer? If we should go to him in the midst of the innocent recreations of life and depend upon him to keep us, would we be led into those things which have so often caused us to hang our heads for shame?

The Grace of Thankfulness

A young man stopped me on the street to ask the time of day. As he turned slowly away I had time to notice that while he was conscious of having received what he wanted, there was not the faintest indication that he recognized it as a favor. As for thanks, he had no tongue for it, and as for thankfulness, he evidently had no heart for it. He was so poor—this well dressed beggar of the streets—that he could not even pay his debts of gratitude.

He came back a little while afterward to ask another favor. I granted it, but I think it must have been with a bad grace. In fact, I felt much as a merchant does when a man who has ignored an old account comes to ask the favor or starting a new one. Why this change in my feelings? When he came to me before, it was a pleasure to stop and grant the trifling favor asked, because he approached me with a show of respect. Now the way was closed, though he was as respectful in manner as before. The trouble was, he knew how to open up the way to favor, but he did not know how to keep it open. We may open the way to another's favor by approaching him in a respectful manner, but we can only keep the way open by acknowledging the favors which he bestows upon us. Here is the chief part which thanksgiving plays in religious experience. It does many things for us; it makes the air better, and

the sun-light more cheerful, and the company happier, and living more delightful, but best of all, it helps to keep the channel of blessing open. The man who goes to God solely to beg, finds that the way must be opened anew every time he goes, and that it is getting harder and harder to open; but the man who sends a prayer to heaven, and then proceeds to use the channel made by it as a channel for the incense of a grateful heart, keeps the way to God open, keeps heaven in sight, and keeps himself where blessings are continually falling. Incense helps to keep the way to heaven clear. A grateful acknowledgment of a past blessing is an effective prayer for a future blessing.

I am reminded of two women whose lives made up two parts of a better sermon on thanksgiving than I can ever hope to preach. One is a poor wretched creature whose life is dominated by the belief that

the world owes her a pension. On what grounds she bases her claim, other than the fact that she has long been in the dilemma of the old woman who lived in a shoe, has never been made quite clear; but that she is fully convinced of its validity has never been doubted by the neighbors from whom she has been diligently collecting it for the past dozen years. A more persistent, untiring, shameless beggar it would be hard to find. She never wants anything that she does not ask for it, and she is liable to want anything anywhere and at any hour of the day or night. And when she comes to beg, it is with the air of a collector who has come for the sixteenth time for the rent that has been three months due. The world owes her a living, and she is going to get it in cash, potatoes or clothes, or somebody will be sorry. And when you have done your best for her, she gives you a look that says as plain as plain

can be that it is no more than you ought to have done long ago, and you don't deserve a bit of thanks for it. There is no expression of gratitude, no sign that you have reached her heart, no indication that she has a heart to reach. If she ever uttered a "Thank you" that meant it, the oldest inhabitant does not recall it. Everybody knows grumbling Jane—under protest. And everybody despises her, as she despises everybody, and calls her a hateful old thing, a public nuisance that ought to be abated, a running sore on the body politic. And yet grumbling Jane is only a human being, made after the pattern of human beings, minus a thankful spirit.

The other woman in the matter of poverty is as much like the miserable creature of whom I have spoken as one black-eyed pea is like another. But if she ever suffers, it is because her needs are not made known, for all the neighbors say that it is more

blessed to give to her than to receive from any one. You would probably call her a beggar, though no one who knows her would think of using such a term in connection with her name. But there are times when the meal gives out, and the wood gives out, and everything gives out, and the poor, struggling creature looks down into the pinched, pale faces of her children, and sets her lips resolutely together, and goes out with her need to a neighbor who has befriended her. But she does not ring the doorbell as if she had a first mortgage on your home. And she does not begin her tale of woe with a complaint against "the people who ought to help the poor and don't do it." And when you have done your best for her—for you always do your best for her—there wells up in her eyes and overflows upon your heart such gratitude that you turn away feeling that you have received too much for your paltry.

gift. And you are better and happier all the day for the vision of a heart that can suffer so much, and yet always keeps full of the spirit of thankfulness. Carry that poor woman a gift, however small, and when you return home you will straightway plan to carry her something better to-morrow. Her thankfulness is such a benediction.

There is nothing in the demands of modern culture inimical to the culture of thanksgiving. The difficulty is, so many think that the art can be acquired by merely studying the forms of graceful expression. You cannot disguise the sounding brass of purely formal thanks with all the art in the world. To give thanks one must be thankful—full of thanks. And to be thankful one must be “thankful.” There is no other secret. One must think upon favors bestowed—one must give as serious thought to the things which are bestowed

as to the things which are desired if the heart is to be kept full. Of course, one must begin at the beginning and learn the art of giving thanks unto Him who is always giving. That is real incense which both ascends and spreads in a circle.

XXVII

When The Heart Aches

An old sheik sits in the door of his tent with his head bowed upon his hand. It is the strong man's hour of weakness. Abram is very rich, but he is very lonely. And he has just returned from a great victory; but what is that to a man whose heart is set on higher things? And what is that to a man to whom God has come with a great promise, and the promise remains unfulfilled? A few years ago he was in his father's home, surrounded by friends; now he is in a strange land, though it is the land of promise, surrounded by newly-made

enemies. And he is childless; and he is old; and the nephew upon whom he had set his heart is no longer his daily comfort. And the days are passing swiftly by, and it begins to look as if God has forgotten his promise.

The sun sets, the shadows gather, and with a heavy sigh the old man rises from his seat, and going into his tent lies down to sleep. That night God comes to him in a vision. God, the great Jehovah, comes and talks with him, a mere man, because he is lonely and cast down—talks with him as a father would talk to his little child—as a father seeing his little one in tears over his play, would come and kneel at his side and put his arm around him and brush away his tears, and then take his little blocks and build his little house for him. And when Abram gives vent to the complaint that is in his heart God does not scold him. He simply leads him out under

the stars, like the patient, loving teacher that he is, and shows him an object-lesson that revives the old man's faith; and when he believes, God in his mercy counts it as a great thing—counts it as so much righteousness. And when Abram asks for a sign God very graciously grants his request and condescends to go through an old ceremony with him by which men bind themselves to each other, that Abram might feel all the more confident that the promise of Jehovah would be fulfilled.

God loves to come to his people in their hour of darkness. He loves to part the fingers that are bound tightly over the weeping eyes and let in the sunlight; and he does it so gently. He loves to bring light to our minds in the midst of our perplexities. He loves to help us with life's mysteries. He loves to soothe the aching heart. He loves to come to us when our little block houses have fallen down and

we are in the midst of hopeless tears. Now the question comes home to us: If all this is true, if God loves to come to us in our need, why do we not go to him? Why should we stand so far off in our time of trouble and look askance at heaven? Why should we insist upon nursing our sorrow in secret? Why should we condemn ourselves to a life of loneliness when we might have Divine companionship? Why should we struggle through the day with our burdens when there is a burden bearer? If God is our shield why should we not go to him and let him shield us?

XXVIII

In The Day of Doubt

There are doubters and doubters. There is the man who has doubts that come to him unbidden and unwelcome. He has my sympathy. And there is the man who sends off for his doubts—to Germany or Chicago—and who is very proud of his large and assorted stock. He has my pity—the sort of pity which we always feel for a man who is making a fool of himself. It is time we were making the distinction. We may laugh if we will at the man who proudly introduces himself as “Mr. Agnostic”; but I cannot find it in my heart to ridicule the

man whose doubts are a source of great trial to his own soul. And there are many men of this sort—many men, and a few women, who would give anything in the world if they could accept the mysteries of our religion with the confidence of little children, but who seem to themselves doomed to grope their way in the dark to the end. And there are many men and women who find believing as natural as breathing, but who have learned that there are times when even breathing itself is not natural. And there are those who have no difficulties of their own, but are in deep distress because a son or a daughter has been drawn into the vortex of doubt. My heart bleeds for the father who stands looking on helplessly while his own son turns his back upon the faith of his fathers.

Religious doubt is sometimes nothing more than a physical or mental phenomenon. It may have nothing whatever to do

at first with one's moral or religious condition. One of the most pious women I have ever known was all her life tormented by doubts. In her case it was a mental disease. But doubts may come with certain changes of mind that are perfectly natural and healthy. If I am told that Mr. Jones has become skeptical, I do not denounce him as a fool, or pity him as a miserable sinner; I simply ask how old he is.

In youth doubt is a symptom of certain changes going on in the mind just as the gosling voice or the down on the upper lip are symptoms of changes going on in the body. For the mind passes through critical periods very much like the body. The first critical period in which doubt is a noticeable symptom occurs ordinarily about the seventeenth year, sometimes earlier. Up to that time your boy has accepted what was told him with child-like confidence. Now everything appears hazy and con-

fused, and it becomes as natural to distrust or doubt as it was formerly to believe. If at this period the youth goes off to school and falls among thieves—agnostics who would steal our faith for which they have no use—and is exposed to the germs of doubt, he is exceedingly liable to catch it. When the mind is passing through this critical stage, it is as easy for a youth to catch doubt as it is for a child to catch measles. The difference is, when the child is told it is measles he believes it and submits to treatment, while the youth who is told that his attack of doubt is only a passing contagion, looks at you as if you were a mild lunatic. A young man goes to Germany and comes back a skeptic. He thinks he has got something; the trouble is something has got him. It is a clear case of mental measles. If you who are nearest to him will take him in hand wisely and nurse him carefully, if you will keep him in a

warm room and give him plenty of flax-seed tea, as it were—that is to say, if you will keep his heart warm by our love and tender care—the attack will in all probability run its course in due time, and he may be none the worse for it. But the trouble is, we do not treat him kindly. We call him a fool. We tell him he has dropsy in his head, and all that; and by such criminal malpractice we have caused many a case to become chronic. There may be trouble with his head, but he is not to blame for that, and we need not remind him of it. We should rather let him feel that we respect him, and that we respect his thoughts. And it would be better to renounce once for all the privilege of lecturing him, to stop trying our arguments upon him, and simply seek to turn his mind by our example to the experimental evidences of Christianity. We can show him what Christ does for our own lives—not by argu-

ing the matter out, but by living it out in his presence. We ought so to walk before him that he will one day wake up and exclaim: I do not see any sense in it; it is all a mystery; but there is mother—I see what it has done for her; there is father, I see what it has done for him.”

A great many attacks of doubt are caused by attempting to think through a great mystery of religion without due preparation or without taking proper precautions. When you were a boy you did not like to feel that there was anything another could do that you could not do. That feeling led you sometimes into water that was over your head because another boy had gone before you; and it caused you to get lost in a swamp because some other boy had successfully explored it. And since you became a man you have had much of the same feeling with regard to your brain. You do not like to admit that what another has

A young man who has never made a study of religious subjects, and does not know what to expect, plunges into the doctrine of miracles, for example. In a moment he is lost. Then he becomes confused and begins to flounder about. By and by some good angel of God may come along and pull him out. Or he may never see light. Another who is equipped for such investigations undertakes the study of the same object. He also gets lost, but knowing what to expect he is not disturbed. He has been through the dark before. He may not see the sunshine, but he knows it is shining. He may not see God, but he knows God is there. And so he goes on quietly with his investigation, always consulting his companionable Bible and following its guidance. And eventually he comes out into the light. Some men have plunged into the thicket with Tom Paine under one arm and a volume of

Ingersoll's under the other, and they have never come out.

Many other doubts come from depending upon the brain to do what it was never designed to do, and can never be made to do. "Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart," says the Book. But the Book also asks: "Canst thou by searching find out God?" Seek God for help, and you will find him, for he will find you; but seek God in order to investigate him, to find out his ways, and you will never find him though you seek him till the crack of doom. For God denies us the right to investigate him. The brain alone cannot investigate and understand God, or the doctrines of God. Here is a little ant crawling in my hand. He looks up in my face and exclaims: "Ho! what is this? A man! Ah! I have heard of him before; he is the creature I want to investigate. I'll see what he thinks; I'll

understand why he treads on us little fellows so unmercifully." Now the ant is a very wise insect, but will he find me out? Will he be able to discover my motive? Here stands a little scientist in the hand of God. He looks up and exclaims: "Ho! what is here? God. Ah! a fit subject for investigation. I am going to discover his thoughts; his motives. I am going to see why he does thus and so." The little ant crawling in my hand will come nearer learning my motives than that man will learn God's. Why? If you want to grasp a thing you must grasp like with like. Here is a book. I want to pick it up. Can I grasp it by an intellectual process? I may stand by it and think thoughts great enough to move the intellectual world, but that book will not move. Can I grasp it with my spirit? Never. What is this book. It is material. Then I must grasp it with that which is material. I can no more pick up this book by an intellectual process than I

can pick up a thought with a pitch-fork. With material things we grasp that which is material; with intellectual things that which is intellectual; with spiritual things that which is spiritual.

But, says one, "If I cannot grasp God with my intellect I can still grasp truth with it." Never! Why? Because truth is spiritual. Here is the great mistake by which so many intellectual men have fallen into doubt. They have tried to understand God's truth by the intellect alone—something which the intellect cannot do—and failing therein they have declared that there is no truth. What, then, can the intellect do? It can grasp facts, theories, arguments. Is not a fact truth? No. It is true, but it is not truth. A fact is the body in which truth may live as the spirit. A fact is a thing existent. It may exist to-day and may be gone to-morrow. Truth is essence—eternal, invisible essence. Truth is the expression of the divine mind—the

Word, the utterances of God. "Thy Word is truth."

You may train your intellect to grasp the most subtle facts of nature and yet be unable to grasp the simplest truth of God. We have exaggerated the power of the intellect until it has become ridiculous. We say the brain can do everything. But nothing has been guilty of wilder things; nothing has yielded greater absurdities, and nothing is so helpless in the presence of the spiritual. Whence come your highest and noblest sentiments? From your brain? Whence your heavenly motives? Whence this undying love?—this discernment of high things? Was it your brain that discovered to you your love for another? How did you discern what was in that mother's heart? By your brain? Why, Professor Sophocles, with all his bulging brow and musty tomes and vile swelling crucibles, old bachelor that he is, can never tell you.

XXIX

Doubt's Surest Remedy

The incident of Peter's walking on the water suggests one of the most common causes of doubt. Peter looked upon Jesus. As he looked, his heart swelled with desire, and his faith grew higher than the highest billow. "I will come to you on the water, Master, if you will only speak the word," he said; and Jesus bade him. With his eyes still upon his Master, he stepped lightly out upon the waves. With his eyes upon his Master, his faith was as outstretched wings, and he scarcely touched the face of the water. But suddenly something—a

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great billow, perhaps—drew his eyes from Jesus, and instantly he was overwhelmed by the fear of Nature. He had been trying to go contrary to Nature—all-powerful Nature! And with that thought he sank. A moment before he was the servant of the Creator; now he was the slave of the creature. He had forgotten that there stood one before him who was greater than Nature. Oh! this idolatrous thought of our hearts—that Nature is the God of the universe! That nothing can be true that is not natural! It is because we trust Nature so much that we trust God so little.

You look into the face of God every day; you live much in your closet; you pray as naturally as you breathe; you listen constantly to his voice; you dwell so close to him that you feel the very breath of his love fan your cheek, and your faith never wavers. But something diverts your attention from the Divine face for a moment.

You become absorbed in the things of Nature, the study of Nature—the study of men, and waves, and tides, and bread, and clothes, and stocks, and bonds, and railroads, and fevers, and politics—and by-and-by the face of God becomes so unreal, so dim, in the distance, that you say, “I don’t know about God. I know Nature.”

After all, the great cure for doubt is a vision of the face of God.

You have a dear friend in a distant community, whom you have not seen for years. In the days when you walked together you trusted him perfectly. Lately you had some correspondence about a matter of business, which resulted in a misunderstanding, and you began to doubt the friend whom you had once trusted as you had trusted your own heart. You wrote him sharply, and he replied, trying to explain; but you could not understand. You could not understand because you had begun to doubt him.

After a while he wrote: "I can't explain the matter on paper; I am coming to see you face to face." And the other day he came. He walked into your office, and you looked into his face. He held out his hand and began to say, "I came to—" "Oh! never mind," you answered, "that is all right. I don't understand it, but I can trust you." The glimpse of his face had brought you back to where you had stood in the days of your perfect confidence. And so, dear friend, yonder is God. You have been thinking of other things of late, and the divine face has gradually receded until you have almost forgotten. And something has happened of late—some great trial, perhaps—that has created a misunderstanding; you don't know about God now. But come to him. Come to the secret place of the Most High, and look again into his face. Then you will say, "Lord, I don't understand, but I don't need to understand. I do not know about this great trial, but I know thee, and I can trust thee forever."

XXX

In The Hour of Peril

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” And he also pities his children who in an hour of peril are overwhelmed with fear of another sort.

It is a truth which we cannot learn too well, for there is perhaps no other teaching which we are so often tempted to doubt. We do not doubt it when the sun shines. We are ready to believe anything that is told us of God’s care for the sparrows so long as we do not feel that we are as helpless as sparrows. But let the clouds come

about our own door and shut out the sunlight from our own windows, and what a host of doubts will gather! "If God really cares for me why does he not come to my help?"—we say in our hearts. And then we begin to wonder if it is not all a mistake. How do I know that he feels toward me as a father? Why does he not show his sympathy for me now that I am so much in need of sympathy? Why should he be so indifferent to my distress? And so on and so on. It is so easy—so very easy to feel when we can no longer help ourselves, that God is not going to help us.

I wonder if the beautiful picture of Christ stilling the tempest was not given us for just such a moment. Certainly, if it does not answer all our questions it at any rate puts an end to them, for one cannot look upon it long without placing his hand upon his mouth. These storm-tossed disciples were asking, in their hearts, at least, the

same sort of questions. "Why does he lie there sleeping while we are in peril of our lives?" "Does he really know we are in peril?" "Does he really care if we perish?" "Could he help us if he were awake?" But presently common sense asserted itself and they went to him. That is the only way to settle a question about Christ; we must go to him. Their faith was weak, but they went; it was the only sensible thing to do. And when they went they found that all the trouble was in their own hearts and not with him at all. He was the same Helper that he had been yesterday and the day before. His heart had not changed. His arm had not grown weak. He was still able and willing to help—willing in spite of the smallness of their faith. And he did help. In his power the storm was nothing more than a little dog frisking at his master's feet. He had only to speak and the wind went down.

Let us lay this story by the side of our own experience. You and I have had our hours of peril when we thought that God was far away, or as one asleep, and we were tempted to complain of his seeming indifference. And yet all the while he had the sea, and the storm, and our poor selves in the hollow of his hand. We are ashamed now that we ever doubted. But the hour of peril will come again: what are we going to do? What will help us to trust him when we can no longer see him?

The Limit of Human Power

There are some things which we can overcome by our own strength, but a stronghold of Satan can never be broken through by human power. There are sinful appetites and tempers within us that have walls about them so high and strong that only Divine power can break them down. It is as foolish for us to try to overcome these things simply by our own strength as it would have been for the children of Israel to try to break down the walls of Jericho by making battering rams of their own heads. We are to do our

part, we are to go armed for the fight, we are to show our faith in God, we are to praise his name, we are to proclaim his presence, but only God can break down the walls.

The same is true with regard to the strongholds of Satan which we are to overcome as a people. We are in the habit of saying that if the good element in society would unite against the bad element, we could wipe out the terrible evils which disgrace our cities. But the fight against a great evil is not a fight between good people and bad people. It is a fight between good people on the one hand, and the bad people reinforced by Satan on the other. We have miscalculated the power intrenched in these great evils. The devil himself is in them. Good men may in their own strength overcome bad men, but good men cannot by their own strength overcome Satan. "This kind goeth not out but by

prayer and fasting." If in the struggle between the good and bad the bad is supported by satanic power, there is no hope for the good unless it is supported by Divine power. Only God is stronger than Satan. We are not to be idle. We are not to let any instrument remain idle. We are not to leave a stone unturned. We are to show ourselves in God's ranks. We are to stand up long enough to be counted. We are to be willing to march in sight of the world, and let the inhabitants of Jericho laugh at us if they will. We are to lift up our hearts continually unto God, and show our faith in the power of God to overcome evil. We are to praise him always for what he has done and for what he is going to do, and we are to be armed and ready to move when the orders come—in a word, we are to do what we can; but if the great evils which afflict the world are ever to be wiped out, we must look to God himself to over-

come the hindrances which are greater than human power.

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down.”
By faith in a Savior who is stronger than Satan we may overcome Satan’s strongholds.

XXXII

In The Valley of The Shadow

A holy life does not insure a man from trouble, but it insures help in trouble. This ought to go without saying, but there are thousands of people who have an idea that if a man will become a Christian everything will go smoothly the rest of his life. As a consequence, in many instances when one accepts Christ and troubles follow, doubts come with them. Indeed there are few of us who have passed through a time of great trial without feeling that the Christian life has not met our expectations, and many of us have said at such a time that

either God had not kept his word, or we had misunderstood him. "The strange part about this awful tragedy," said a friend to me yesterday, "is that this old man who has been so overwhelmed with trouble in his last days is one of the best men I ever knew; I can't understand it." As if our Lord had ever said, "Come unto me all ye that are afraid of trouble and I will give you an easy time." God would no more keep us out of trouble than a man would keep his land from being plowed, his vines from being pruned, his trees from being shaken to their roots by the March winds, his son from being laid upon the surgeon's table, if thereby his life might be saved.

No, we shall have trouble. We may have trouble even to the breaking of our hearts. God has nowhere promised that the heart shall not break. He has only promised that it shall not break beyond

mending. "He healeth the broken in heart."

We often need to be reminded of this when prostrated by a crushing blow. It is then, if ever, that we feel like reminding God that he has not kept his word. Has he not promised that no trial shall overtake us greater than we can bear? Yes; but he has not promised that no trial shall overtake us, and, as for bearing it, there is time enough to decide about that. Do you not recall the great sorrow of years ago, when for weeks you carried about with you that horrible sensation of something pulling at your heart-strings—how you felt that your heart was broken, and that you could never survive, because, forsooth, it was broken?

But many a broken heart goes unmended. Some because they do not want to be mended, as the mother bereft of her child, who nurses her sorrow, and proclaims that

she never wants to recover from it. And some because the wrong methods are used. He who depends upon Time to heal a broken heart is putting more on Time's shoulders than they can carry. Time heals many surface wounds, but it mends nothing that is once broken. And he who expects to heal the wound by dissipation will fail, because he does no honor to the Heartmaker thereby.

There is no one so deeply interested in that heart as He who made it for his dwelling place. And there is no one who understands it so well, and who knows so well the treatment it needs. "He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds." And the sooner we can feel this in the midst of our trouble the better. So much of time and of light and of joy is lost because it takes so long to learn where to find a physician. So many of us never go

to the healer of hearts until we have tried all the quack remedies.

We reach the dregs in our cup of sorrow the moment we imagine that God has forsaken us. Nothing else in half so bitter. On the other hand, the bitterest cup overflows with honey for him who can read around its rim the divinely engraved inscription, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Bolster up our faith as we may, there are times when the strongest of all temptations is to feel that God is no longer with us. And the temptation is only strengthened when we turn from ourselves to see how it has fared with the best of his children. Abraham on the mount with uplifted knife; Jacob, prosperous in young manhood, but in old age bereft of his best beloved son, and threatened by famine; David fleeing from Jerusalem for fear of Absalom; Daniel, the only man in the

realm who prayed three times a day, thrown to the lions; the Son of God himself crying out in his last agony upon the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—these are the scenes which, meeting us at every turn, send us back to our own sorrow with the despairing cry, "Is his mercy clean gone forever? doth his promises fail for evermore?"

But God forsakes no man—not even his enemies. All the expressions in the Bible which seem to point that way are simply presentations of the matter from our point of view. When God says, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," he is not talking poetically, though it is most beautiful poetry. He is stating a simple fact, and binding himself in a plain promise. He tells us that he is with us, that where he is he stays, and that whether we see him or not, we may always know where to find him, because he changes not. He cannot leave us.

We may leave him. And that is as it usually happens; we run off from him, and accuse him of running off from us. Then when we go back and find him just where we left him, we feel ashamed.

Sorrow is an angel sent from God to do his bidding—if we are willing.

And only as we are willing. When we are suffering we often comfort ourselves with the thought that now God has taken our salvation in his own hands, and is purifying us by pain, in spite of ourselves. "I think surely I will get to Heaven," said a tired mother, "for I have had so much trouble." But there is no virtue in trouble. We count the lashes upon our backs and treasure up the drops of blood as so many shekels that will pay our way one day to Heaven. But the question of the Father will be not how many strokes were laid upon us, but how many we bore. You try to punish your wayward boy, and he re-

sists your will and spits in your face. You do not think, when you have finally conquered him, that he deserves a stick of candy for letting you whip him. And it is the child of that type who usually asks for the candy, as it is the child of God who rebels outrageously in suffering that wants God to give him Heaven because he has had so much pain.

Whether our sorrow shall yield sweetness or gall depends not so much upon what is in the sorrow as upon what is in ourselves.

The first thing to do in trouble is to submit. The first thing a wayward child does when he is punished is to ask what in the world father wants to whip him for. Quiet submission would lessen the force of the blows and give opportunity for the reflection the child needs. It is not of prime importance for the child of God to know all about the nature of his affliction ; but it is

of prime importance that he should at once submit and place himself entirely in the hands of God. Perfect resignation will enable us to receive every stroke thoughtfully, and will usually enable us to see through our trouble before we get to its end.

The next point is to be quiet. Noise intensifies pain. He who cries aloud loses his hold upon the rebellious nature within, which must be kept under at any cost. Don't talk to everybody about your trouble. Don't fan the flame of discontent. Don't be forever on the lookout for somebody to sympathize with you. People who do that soon forget the only One who can be truly touched with a sense of our infirmities. Don't ask everybody around why the Lord should let you suffer so much.

It is easy to mark every step a sufferer takes toward Heaven. As we grow in grace, we endure more gracefully. We be-

come less noisy. The severest pain of which we have ever known or heard failed to drive the smile from the face of a saintly woman who endured in silence, and between the paroxysms spoke only of the love of Jesus.

Finally, pain is purifying when it inspires prayer and a love for the Word of God. The sorrow that turns us away from the Book will never make us saintly. A whispered prayer of submission—not boisterous begging, but the quiet pleading of a divine promise—is the only medicine we have known that could quiet the most intense pain without in a measure destroying the consciousness of the sufferer.

Comfort In Bereavement

A little slab meeting-house away out in the mountains, a little coffin resting on a backless bench in the midst, a little bunch of red and pink roses tied with a bit of blue ribbon lying on the lid, and a little knot of curious, cold-blooded folks gazing now at the coffin, and now at the figure of a young man who leans over it with his face buried in his hands trying to stifle the sobs which convulse his manly frame. He is not one of them—you can see it at a glance—and no heart goes forth toward him because he has committed the unpardonable sin of being better than they.

This was all that I saw at the time but I remember it was told me by one of his neighbors who was present, that his young heart-broken wife was lying hopelessly sick at home trying to nurse a sick babe, and I knew that her only earthly comforter had gone off with her first-born to put it out of her sight forever. Not forever, for within a week she too would go. And I remember the young man himself was ill and threatened with the loss of his vision. And they were poor. And they were God's children.

I have been thinking how that scene tried my faith. It would have tried yours if you had been there. Not until I could get away from the scene of sorrow could I understand the words of comfort which my dumb lips tried in vain to utter. Nor do I understand them well now. But I have learned this much: When I have prayed for light and do not see it, I do not forget

that God sees it and it is enough for me to know that there is light. We cannot see God through our tears ; or if we do it is like the reflection of the sun in troubled waters. I should not judge my Master by the distorted view I get of him through my tears any more than I would judge my mother by the glimpse I have had of her face in a spoilt mirror.

This simple fact,—that the first burst of grief is always blinding—fixed in the mind at the beginning of one's hour of darkness is worth more than all the help of those who were "born to solace and to soothe." The tears which cleanse our vision first obscure it. This is as true of our intellectual and moral vision as it is of our physical eyesight. When the heart is overwhelmed all our views are distorted. Men appear as trees walking. The look of pity in the face of God is mistaken for a frown ; the rod we would kiss appears as a cruel sword dripping with blood. If your hour

of darkness has come sit down and try to grasp this fact. Say over and over again to your heart: This sorrow has blinded me; things are not what they seem; in my present condition I cannot afford to trust my eyes, my judgment, my feelings. I cannot afford to judge God by what I see of him through my tears; I am in no condition to answer these questions which knock so loudly at my heart; I must wait; there is a whole eternity in which to find out the truth about God's dealings with me. Failing to do this you will fall into mistakes which will add sorrow to sorrow, and afterwards overwhelm you with humiliation. "I cannot think of God as anything but harsh and cruel," said a mother to me recently; "why does he not explain his conduct to me?" I replied: "If your little daughter came to you complaining of your harshness and cruelty and demanded to know the reason for your conduct, would you trouble yourself to explain? Would

you not wait until she was in a mood to understand and accept an explanation? And if she changed her attitude and begged forgiveness for her harshness would you not quickly take her in your lap and tell her all?"

How often we delay our healing by continuing in such an attitude before God that he cannot tell us anything. It was poor Job's trouble. He talked and talked, and his friends talked; but he got no relief. Then God rebuked him for darkening counsel "by words without knowledge," and he saw his mistake, confessed that he had uttered that he understood not, and "abhorred himself in dust and ashes." "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job." So long as grief keeps our eyes closed there is nothing for us to do but to keep our mouths closed. David understood this, and said: "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou did'st it."

When the blinding tears have done their

work the lips may open with safety, for they will open with praise. It is hard to believe it now—in the midst of darkness that can be felt. But think a moment. Five years ago your firstborn went home. You felt then as you feel now; you felt that you could never think of the little one again without the horrible sensation of something gnawing at your heart. But five long, lonely years have passed and with them the clouds: the sun shines out now, and although you may look up into the clear azure still watching for the glimpse of a baby face, the sweetest, happiest, blessedest thought of your life—the thought which strengthens you when all others fail—is that you have one precious cherub safe at home. You would not have her back in this cold world for all the universe. You would not have her return to you, for you are preparing to go to her. And so it will be with the present sorrow if you will but look up. Let the tears fall if they will, but

look up. Solace is for those who seek it. We may extract sweetness out of woe if we will, but if we let it alone it will yield only gall.

There is never a sorrow so bitter but we seek to add to it. It is easy to fall in love with misery. Many a broken heart is never healed because the broken-hearted one does not want to be healed. Torn from her child, the mother's first impulse is to bind her soul to grief. She seeks to keep her heart bleeding by thinking of what she might have done, and blaming herself for the little one's sickness and death. Or, she probes her heart to find out whether she is not rebelling against God. It is wise to examine ourselves, but when the heart is quivering with pain God would not have us probe it. If the heart is to be healed we must let it alone and allow the Physician to look after it. Be a good patient; put yourself in the hands of your Physician and think of him. If you can-

not think of him, do the next best thing: think of your glorified child. Not your suffering child, but your glorified child. Put yourself in her place. While she was with you your one thought was her happiness; you gave your life for her; you were wholly unselfish, self-sacrificing. Why should you descend from this high estate and give yourself to selfish thoughts? Why should you think of your own sorrow when you can think of her joy? You prayed that she might be happy: it was hard to pray for anything else: now that God has answered your prayer, will you complain because the answer was so different from your expectations? In praying for her happiness did you intend only to pray for your own happiness?

Put yourself in her place. You torture your heart continually with the thought of what she suffered: you cannot help feeling that God was cruel to allow it; that he was cruel not to allow her to remain here with

you. Does she now torture her heart with the thought of what she suffered? Does she care? Looking up into his face does she think that he is cruel? Put yourself in her place. How often, when you have held the precious burden in your lap and pressed the little hand to your lips and counted its dimples—how often have the mists come over you when you have thought what these little hands would have to do! How often your heart has ached at the thought of the hard, stony paths those little pink feet would have to tread! “Oh, the world is too hard and cold for my babe!” you have said over and over again. Can you be angry with God that he should agree with you? Is she angry? Put yourself in her place. With all your wealth of love, did you ever feel that your care would be sufficient for her? Did you ever feel satisfied that you were doing all that ought to be done? Did you not feel that you were not equal to the responsibility placed

upon you? Did you not feel that with all your love and care you could not shield her as you would like from the hardships of life? But now she is in the hands of One who can do the best, and who will do the best, because his love exceeds even a mother's love. If we know anything at all about Jesus, we know that his heart overflowed with a tender and gracious affection for children. It was natural that his pure soul should go forth toward those whose lives illustrated the virtues he so highly prized. In a world darkened by sin they were his most congenial companions. They refreshed his spirit. And he took them in his arms and laid his hands upon them and blessed them. Surely you can never forget that. Can you not give thanks to God that the tender Shepherd who took the little ones in his arms nearly nineteen hundred years ago is the same Jesus into whose hands you committed the spirit of your own child when she was called up higher?



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